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THE MISTRESS OF HUSABY

KRISTIN LAVRANSDATTER, II

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"Methinks it would be more seemly that your daughter should grow up here in your manor."

"In your manor, mean you?" asked Simon.

A little tremor passed over the lady's face.

"You know well, my husband, that as long as we both live, you are master here at Mandvik," said she.

Simon went and laid his hands on his wife's shoulders:

"If, indeed, Halfrid, you deem you can bear to see the child here in our home, great thanks shall I owe you for your high-heartedness."

He liked it not. He had seen the young one more than once—'twas not a comely child, and he could not see that it favoured him or any of his folks. Less than ever did he believe that he was the father. And he had been sorely angered when he heard that Jorunn had had the child christened Arngjerd, after his mother, without leave asked of him. But he must let Halfrid have her way.

She fetched the child to Mandvik, found a foster-mother for it, and saw to it herself that the little one lacked naught. If her eyes chanced to fall upon the child, she often took it on her lap and tended it kindly and lovingly. And by little and little, as Simon saw more of it, he grew fond of the little maid—he had a great love of children. Now, too, he thought he could see a likeness in Arngjerd to his father. It was like that Jorunn had been wise enough to be on her good behaviour after the master had gone too far with her.—So it might well be that Arngjerd was his daughter, and what he had done at Halfrid's asking was the best and most honourable way.

When they had been five years wedded, Halfrid bore her husband a son, a full-formed man-child. She was transfigured with joy, but after her delivery she fell so sick that it was soon plain to all that she must die. Yet was she of good cheer, the last time when for a while she was herself. "Now shall you live on here as master, Simon, and hand on Mandvik and all our lands to your children and mine," she said to her husband.

After this the fever mounted so high that she knew no more, and she had not the grief, while yet on earth, of hearing that her boy had died a day before his mother. And in the other home, Simon thought, 'twas most like she felt no sorrow for such things, but was glad that she had their Erling with her.

Simon remembered afterward that, the night the two bodies lay up in the loft-room, he had stood leaning over the fence of a field that lay down by the sea-shore. It was just before St. John's Mass, and

the night was so bright that the full moon's light was wellnigh blotted out. The water lay there palely shining, and plashed and gurgled a little on the strand. Simon had hardly slept more than an hour at a time, ever since the night the boy had been born—it seemed to him now very long ago—and he was so weary that he could scarce feel grief.

He was seven and twenty years old at this time.

Well on in the summer, when the estate was settled, Simon made over Mandvik to Stig Haakonssön, Halfrid's uncle's son. He moved to Dyfrin and stayed there the winter.

Old Sir Andres was bedridden, with dropsy and many other ills and aches; he was nearing his end now, and he bemoaned him much—life had not been so plain and simple for him either in these latter days. Things had not gone so with his fair and likely children as he had wished and looked that they should. Simon sat by his father and tried hard to get back to the easy jesting note of old—but the old man bemoaned himself without cease; Helga Saksesdatter, whom Gyrd had wedded, was so fine that she knew not what follies she should hit upon next—Gyrd dared not belch in his own house without asking his wife's leave. And this Torgrim, ever and always in a pother about his belly—never should Torgrim have had daughter of his, had he known that the man was such a poor wretch he could neither live nor die. Astrid could have no joy of her youth or her wealth so long as her husband lived. And here was Sigrid, broken and grieving—smiles and song had quite gone from her, his good child. That she should have had that child—and Simon no children! Sir Andres wept, an old, unhappy, sick man. Gudmund had set himself against every match his father had spoken of for him, and he was so old and useless now he had let the lad run wild altogether. . . .

——But all the ill fortune had begun when Simon and that maid from the Dale set themselves up against their parents. And 'twas Lavrans' blame—for, bold a man as he was among men, he was chicken-hearted with his womenkind. The girl had snivelled and screeched, no doubt—and straightway he gave in and sent for that gilded whore-monger from Trondheim that could not so much as wait till he had been given his bride in wedlock. But if Lavrans had but been master in his own house, he, Andres Darre, would soon have shown that he could put sense in the head of a beardless whelp of a son. Kristin Lavransdatter—*she* bore children a-plenty—a strapping son every eleventh month, he had heard. . . .

"Aye, but that comes dear, Father," said Simon, laughing. "The heritage comes to be split up sadly." He took Arngjerd up and set her on his lap—she had just come trotting into the room.

"Aye, 'twill not be through *her* that your heritage will be split up too small—whoever else it be that shall divide it," said Sir Andres testily. He was fond of his grandchild in a fashion, but it angered him that Simon had a base-born child. "Have you thought upon any new match, Simon?"

"Nay, you must let Halfrid grow cold in her grave first, Father," said Simon, stroking the child's pale hair. "I shall wed again in good time—but sure there is no such haste——"

He took his bow and his ski and set forth for the woods, where he could breathe more freely. With his dogs he tracked the elk on the snow-crust, and he shot the capercailzie drowsing in the tree-tops. At night he slept in the Dyfrin forest sæter, and felt that 'twas good to be alone.

There was a scraping of ski outside on the hard snow; his dogs flew up barking, and other dogs answered from without. Simon opened the door upon a night blue with moonlight, and his elder brother Gyrd came in, tall and slender and comely and quiet. He looked younger now than Simon, who had ever been somewhat stout, and had grown a deal heavier in his years at Mandvik.

The brothers sat with the food-wallet between them, eating and drinking, and gazing into the hearth-fire.

"You must have seen," said Gyrd, "that Torgrim means to set us all by the ears when father is gone—and he has gotten Gudmund on his side. And Helga. They would fain keep Sigrid out of her full sister's share——"

"I have seen it. Her full share she shall have—you and I, brother, can sure make that good in despite of them."

"The best, mayhap, would be that father should take order in this before he dies," said Gyrd.

"Nay, let father die in peace," said Simon. "You and I between us should be able to guard our sister and see that they strip her not because she has fallen into such mischance."

Thus it came about that on Sir Andres Darre's death his heirs parted in bitter unkindness. Gyrd was the only one to whom Simon said farewell when he set out from home—and he knew that the life Gyrd's wife was leading him in these days was a none too happy one. Sigrid

he took with him to Formo—she was to manage his house, and he to see to her lands and goods.

He rode into his manor on a grey-blue day of melting snows, when the alder thickets by the Laagen were brown with blossom. When he had alighted and was entering the hall, with Arngjerd on his arm, Sigrid Andresdatter asked:

"Why smiled you, Simon?"

"Smiled——?"

He had been thinking how far unlike was this home-coming to what he had looked for once—when the day came when he should take up his abode here on the manor of his father's mother's kin. A sister dishonoured, and a bastard child, these were his belongings now.

The first summer he saw but little of the Jörundgaard folks—he took much pains to shun them.

But the Sunday after the second Mary's Mass in the autumn, it chanced that he stood by Lavrans Björgulfssön's side in the church, so that 'twas they two that had to give each other the kiss of peace when Sira Eirik had prayed that the peace of Holy Church might be increased in us. And when he felt the elder man's thin, dry lips against his cheek, and heard him murmur the prayer for peace upon him, he was strangely moved. He saw that Lavrans meant more by it than but to follow a usage of the Church.

He hastened out when the mass was over; but at the standing for the horses he came on Lavrans, who prayed him to come with him to Jörundgaard and dine. Simon answered that his daughter was sick and his sister sitting by her. Lavrans then prayed that God might heal the child, and shook hands for farewell.

One evening some days after, they had been hard at work at Formo getting in the harvest, for the weather looked doubtful. The most of the corn was housed by the evening, when the first shower came down. Simon ran across the court-yard in pouring rain, while a stream of yellow sunlight from between the clouds shone on the hall-house and the mountain wall behind it—and there he was ware of a little maid standing at the door in sun and rain. She had his favourite dog with her—it broke loose and leaped upon the man, dragging after it a woman's woven belt tied to its collar.

He saw that the girl was the child of a good house—she was cloakless and bare-headed, but her wine-red frock was of city-bought cloth,

broidered, and made fast on the breast with a silver-gilt brooch. A silk cord held back the ringleted hair, now dark with the wet, from her forehead. She had a lively little face with broad forehead and pointed chin and great shining eyes, and her cheeks were flaming red, as though she had been running hard.

Simon saw who the maid must be, and greeted her by name, Ramborg.

"How comes it that you do me so much honour as to come hither to us?"

'Twas the dog, she said, as she went with him into the house out of the rain. It had a trick of running off to Jörundgaard; now had she brought it back. Aye, she knew it was his dog; she had seen it running after him as he rode by.

Simon rebuked her a little for having come hither on foot quite alone; he said he would have horses saddled and take her home himself. But first, to be sure, she must have some food. Ramborg ran across at once to the bed where little Arngjerd lay ailing, and both the child and Sigrid were much pleased with the guest, for Ramborg was quick and lively. She was not like her sisters, Simon thought.

He rode with Ramborg as far as the by-road to the manor, and would then have turned about; but there he met Lavrans, who had just learned that the child was not with her playmates at Laugarbru, and was setting forth with his people to search—he was much alarmed. Simon was made to come in, and when he had once taken his seat up in the hall his shyness fell from him and he felt quickly at home again with Ragnfrid and Lavrans. They sat late over their drink, and as it was now set in foul weather, he was thankful to stay the night.

There were two beds in the hall. Ragnfrid made up one of them fairly for the guest, and now someone asked where Ramborg was to sleep—with her parents, or in another house.

"Nay, for I will be in my own bed," said the child. "Can I not sleep with you, Simon?" she begged.

Her father said their guest must not be plagued with children in his bed; but Ramborg went on clamouring that she *would* sleep along with Simon. At last Lavrans said sternly that she was too old to share a bed with a strange man.

"No, Father, that am I not," she said stubbornly. "I am not too big, am I, Simon?"

"You are too little," said Simon, laughing. "Ask me in five years,

Ramborg, and be sure I shall not say you nay. But I warrant that then you will have another sort of man, little Ramborg, than a fat and ugly old widower."

It seemed that Lavrans liked not the jest; he told the girl sharply to hold her tongue and go lie down in her parents' bed. But Ramborg cried out once more:

"Now have you asked for me, Simon Darre, and in my father's hearing."

"So have I, indeed," answered Simon laughing. "But I fear me, Ramborg, he will answer no."

After this day the Jörundgaard folks and those of Formo were much together. Ramborg was over at the neighbour manor whenever a chance served; she played with Arngjerd as if the child had been her doll, ran about with Sigrid helping in the housekeeping, and would sit in Simon's lap when they were in the hall. He fell again into the habit of petting and romping with the maid, as he had been used to do in old days, when she and Ulvhild had been as little sisters to him.

Simon had dwelt two years in the Dale, when Geirmund Hersteinssön of Kruke made suit for Sigrid Andresdatter. The Kruke kindred were of old yeoman stock, but though one and another of the men had served the Kings in the body-guard, they had never won any name beyond their own country-side. Yet was it as good a match as Sigrid could look to make, and she herself was willing to be wed with Geirmund. So her brother closed the bargain, and Simon held his sister's wedding at his house.

One evening just before, while the hurry and bustle of making ready for the feast were at their worst, Simon said in jest that he knew not what would become of his house when Sigrid had left him. Then said Ramborg:

"You must do the best you can for two years, Simon. At fourteen years a maid is fit to wed, and then you can bring me home."

"Nay, *you* will I not have," said Simon, laughing. "I dare not undertake to bridle so wild a maid as you."

" 'Tis the stillest tarns that run the deepest, says my father!" Ramborg cried. "*I* am the wild kind, I. My sister, she was meek and mild. Have you forgotten Kristin now, Simon Andressön?"

Simon leapt up from the bench, lifted the maid up against his breast, and kissed her throat so hard that the skin was flecked with red. Aghast and amazed at himself, he loosed her, caught up

Arngjerd, and threw her up and crushed her to him in the same way to hide his disorder. He went on romping with the two, the little and the half-grown maid, and chasing them about, while they fled from him up on tables and benches; at last he set them up on the cross-beam next the door, and ran out.

——Kristin's name was scarce ever named at Jörundgaard—in his hearing.

Ramborg Lavransdatter grew comely as she grew in years. The talk of the country-side grew busy making matches for her. At one time it was Eindride Haakonssön of the Valders Gjeslings. They were kin in the fourth degree, but Lavrans and Haakon were both so rich they could well afford to send letters to the Pope in Valland and get dispensation. The match would put an end to some of the old suits-at-law that had gone on ever since the old Gjeslings went out with Duke Skule, and king Haakon took the Vaage lands from them and gave them to Sigurd Eldjarn. Ivar Gjesling the Young had won back Sundbu by weddings and exchanges, but these matters had led to endless jars and dissensions. Lavrans laughed at it all himself; the part of the spoil he could claim in his wife's right was not worth the calfskin and wax he had used up in the suit—to say naught of the trouble and the journeys. But seeing he had been in the broil ever since he was a wedded man, he must hold out to the end. . . .

But Eindride Gjesling took another maid to wife, and the Jörundgaard folks seemed not overmuch cast down. They were at the bride-ale, and Ramborg told her friends proudly, when she came home, that four men had come forward to sound Lavrans about her, either for themselves or for kinsmen. Lavrans had answered that he would not make any bargain for his daughter's hand till she was old enough to say a word in the matter herself.

So things went on till the spring of the year when Ramborg was fourteen winters old. One evening that spring she was in the byre at Formo with Simon, looking at a calf that had been born. It was white with a brown patch, and the patch seemed to Ramborg to be the very shape of a church. Simon sat on the edge of the corn-bin, while the girl leaned across his knees, and he pulled at her plaits:

"Then I wager 'tis a token that you will soon ride to church, a bride, Ramborg."

"Aye, you know well enough my father will not answer no the day you ask for me," she said. "I am so grown up now, I might well wed this year."

Simon was a little taken aback, but he tried to laugh:

"Are you there again with that foolish old jest?"

"You know well that 'tis no jest," said the girl, looking up at him with her great eyes. "I have known it long—that 'tis to you here, at Formo, I would most fain come. Why have you kissed me and set me in your lap many a time and often, if you would not have me?"

"Right fain would I be to have you, my Ramborg. But I had never thought that so fair and young a maid could be meant for me. I am seventeen years older than you—you have not thought, I trow, how you would like to have an old blear-eyed, big-bellied husband when you were a woman in your best years——"

"*These* are my best years," said she, beaming, "and not yet are you so old and tottering, Simon!"

"But ugly I am—soon would you be sick of kissing *me*."

"That have you no cause to believe," she answered, laughing as before, and held up her mouth to be kissed. But he did not kiss her.

"I will not profit by your simpleness, my sweet. Lavrans will take you with him to the south this summer. Should you not have changed your thoughts ere you come back, then will I thank God and Our Lady for better fortune than I had looked for—but bind you I will not, fair Ramborg."

He called his dogs, took his spear and bow, and went up on the hills that same evening. There was much snow in on the uplands still; he struck off to his sæter and got him a pair of ski, then lay out for a week by the tarn south of the Boar Fells and hunted reindeer. But the evening he set off down toward home, he grew uneasy and fearful again. 'Twould be like Ramborg if she had spoken of it to her father in spite of all. When he came over the hill-crest by the Jörundgaard sæter, he saw smoke and sparks going up from the roof. He thought maybe 'twas Lavrans himself that was there, and he went up to the huts.

He thought he could see from the other's bearing that he had guessed right. But they sat there talking of the bad summer last year and of when it would likely be best to move up the cattle this year, of the hunting, and of Lavrans' new hawk, which sat on the floor, flapping its wings over the pluck of the birds that were roasting on a spit over the fire. Lavrans had come up but to see to his horse-shelter in Ilmandsdal—some folks from Alvdal that had come by it

that day had told him it was fallen down—So passed the most of the evening. At last Simon spoke up:

"I know not if—has Ramborg said aught to you of a matter she and I spoke of one night?"

Lavrans said slowly:

"Methinks it had been well you had spoken to me first, Simon—you might have known what answer you would have had of me. Aye, aye—I understand how it may have chanced that you named it first to the maid—and it shall make no odds. I am glad that things are so that I can bestow the child in a good man's hands."

After this there was not much more to be said, thought Simon. Strange enough, all the same—here sat he who had never dreamed of making too free with an honest maid or a wife, and he was bound in honour to wed one whom he would liefer not have had. But he made one trial:

"Yet neither is it so, Lavrans, that I have gone wooing your daughter behind your back—I thought I was so old that she would not take it for more than brotherly kindness from old days that I spoke so much with her. And if you deem I am too old for her, I should not marvel at it, nor let it part the friendship betwixt us."

"Few men have I met whom I would rather have in a son's stead than you, Simon," said Lavrans. "And I would fain give Ramborg away myself. You know who will be her guardian when I am gone." It was the first time aught had been said between these two of Erlend Nikulaussön. "In many ways my son-in-law is a better man than I took him to be, when first I knew him. But I know not if he is the man to deal wisely with the giving of a young maid in marriage. And I mark well that Ramborg herself is willing."

"So thinks she now," said Simon. "But she is scarce out of her childhood. Therefore have I no wish to press the matter on you now, if you deem it should stand over yet awhile."

"And I," said Lavrans, frowning a little, "have no wish to force my daughter upon you—believe not that."

"*You* must believe," said Simon quickly, "there is no maid in Norway's land that I would rather have than Ramborg. So it is, Lavrans, that I deemed it all too great good fortune for me if I should get me so fair and young and good a bride, rich, and come on both sides of the highest kin. And you for father-in-law," he said a little sheepishly.

A slight laugh came from Lavrans:

"Oh, you know well what I think of you. And I know you will so

deal with my child and her heritage that we never shall have cause to repent this bargain, her mother and I——"

"That will I, God and all holy men helping me," said Simon.

On that they shook hands. Simon remembered the first time he had clasped hands with Lavrans on such a bargain; and his heart grew little and sore in his breast.

But Ramborg *was* a better match than he could have looked for. There were only the two daughters to divide between them what Lavrans left. And he would be as a son to the man whom, of all men he knew, he had ever honoured and loved the most. And Ramborg was young and fresh and sweet. . . .

And surely by this time he should be a grown man with a grown man's wit. Had he been waiting here thinking that he might wed as a widow her whom he could not win as a maid—after yon other had enjoyed her youth—and a dozen of stepsons of that breed—nay, then he would be rightly served if his brothers had him adjudged incapable and set him aside from managing his own affairs. Erlend would live to be as old as the hills—such fellows as he always did. . . .

Aye, so now they were to be brothers-in-law. They had not seen each other since that night in yonder house at Oslo. Well, it must be yet less joyful for the other to remember than for him.

He would be a good husband to Ramborg, without falsehood or guile. Though it might almost be said the child had beguiled *him* into a snare——

"You are laughing?" asked Lavrans.

"Did I laugh? 'Twas but a thought that came into my head."

"You must tell me what it was, Simon—so that I may have a laugh too."

Simon Andressön fastened his little, sharp eyes on the other.

"I was thinking of—women. I marvel if any woman regards men's faith and men's laws as we do amongst ourselves—when she or hers can gain by setting them at naught. Halfrid, my first wife—aye, this have I never told to any Christian soul before you, Lavrans Björgulfssön, and to none other will I ever tell it—she was so good and holy and upright a woman that methinks her like has scarce ever lived—I have told you how she took the matter of Arngjerd's birth. But that time when we saw how things were with Sigrid—aye—she would have had me hide away my sister and that *she* should feign to be with child, and should pass off Sigrid's child for hers. For thus had we had an heir, and the child had been well provided, and

Sigrid could dwell with us and need not be parted from it. I verily believe she understood not it would have been treachery against her own kinsmen——"

Lavrans said, after a pause:

"Then you could have kept Mandvik, Simon——"

"Aye." Simon Darre laughed harshly. "And mayhap with as good a right as many another man to the land he calls the heritage of his fathers. Since we have naught to trust to in such matters but the honour of women."

Lavrans slipped the hood over his falcon's head, and lifted the bird upon his wrist.

"This is strange talk for a man thinking of marriage," he said low. There was something like distaste in his voice.

"Of *your* daughters I trow none thinks such things," answered Simon.

Lavrans looked down at the falcon and scratched its feathers with a stick.

"Not of Kristin either?" he asked yet lower.

"No," said Simon firmly. "She behaved not well toward me, but never did I find that she dealt in falsehood. She told me plainly and honestly that she had met a man whom she loved more than me."

"When you gave her up so willingly," asked the father in a low voice, "was it not because you had heard some—some rumours—about her?"

"No," said Simon as before. "I had never heard rumours about Kristin."

It was fixed that the betrothal-ale should be drunk that same summer, and the wedding be held after Easter the next year, when Ramborg would be full fifteen years old.

Kristin had not seen her home since the day she had ridden away from it as a bride—'twas now eight winters since. Now she came back with a great company—her husband, Margret, five sons, nurse-girls, handmaids, men and pack-horses with baggage. Lavrans rode out to join them, and met them at Dovre. Kristin no longer wept so lightly as in her youth, but when she saw her father come riding to meet her, her eyes filled with tears. She stopped her horse, slipped down from the saddle, and ran to met him, and when they met she took his hand and kissed it humbly. Lavrans leapt from his horse at once, and lifted his daughter up in his arms. Then he shook hands with

Erlend, who had also alighted, and now came to meet his father-in-law with a reverent greeting.

The next day Simon came over to Jörundgaard to greet his new kinsfolk. Gyrd Darre and Geirmund of Kruke were with him, but their wives they had left at Formo. Simon had chosen to hold his wedding at home, so the women there were in a great bustle.

As to the manner of the meeting—Simon and Erlend greeted each other freely and without constraint. Simon was master of himself, and Erlend was so gay and cheerful that Simon thought he must have forgotten where they had last seen each other. Then Simon gave Kristin his hand. They were less sure of themselves, and their eyes met but for an instant.

Kristin thought to herself that he had fallen off greatly. In youth he had been comely enough, although even then too thickset and short-necked. His steel-grey eyes had looked little under the full eyelids; his mouth had been too small, and the dimples in his round boyish face too large. But he had had a fresh-hued visage, and a broad milk-white forehead beneath goodly light-brown curly hair. The curly hair he had still, as thick and nut-brown as before, but his face was now an even red-brown all over, wrinkled under the eyes, and with heavy cheeks and a double chin. His body, too, was grown heavy—and he had something of a paunch. He looked not now like a man who would care to lie at night on the edge of a bed for the sake of whispering with his betrothed maid. Kristin felt pity for her young sister; she was so fresh and gracious and so childishly joyful that she was to be wed. The very first day she had shown Kristin the chests filled with her bridal gear and Simon's betrothal-gifts—and she had told how she had heard from Sigrid Andresdatter of a gilded casket that stood in the bridal-loft at Formo; there were twelve costly linen coifs in it, and they were to be a gift to her from her husband the first morning. Poor little soul, how could she understand what marriage was? 'Twas pity that she knew so little of this young sister—Ramborg had been at Husaby twice, but there she had ever been sullen and unfriendly—she could not get to like Erlend, nor yet Margret, who was of her own age.

Simon thought that he had looked—perhaps hoped—that Kristin should seem somewhat worn, seeing she had had so many children. But she bloomed with youth and health, and she bore her as proudly straight as ever, and walked as graciously, though it might be she trod the earth now a little more firmly than of old. She was the comeliest mother, with her five fair little sons around her.

She was clad in a dress of home-made rusty-brown woollen with dark-blue birds woven into it—he remembered standing about and leaning up against her loom while she sat weaving on the stuff.

There was a little trouble when they came to sit down to table in the upper hall. Skule and Ivar began shrieking, for they were bent on sitting between their mother and their foster-mother as they were used to do. Lavrans thought it not seemly that Ramborg should sit below her sister's serving-woman and small children—so he bade his younger daughter sit in the high-seat beside him, since she was so soon to be parted from her home.

The little lads from Husaby were restless, and seemed not to know much of behaviour at the board. The meal had not gone far, when the little fair-haired boy slid down under the table and came up by the wall-bench beside Simon's knee.

"May I look at that strange sheath you have there in your belt, kinsman Simon?" he said; he spoke slowly and gravely. It was the great silver-mounted sheath to hold a spoon and two knives he had caught sight of.

"You may so, kinsman. What is your name, Cousin?"

"Gaute Erlendssön is my name, Cousin."

He put down the piece of bacon he was holding on the lap of Simon's festal doublet of silver-grey Flemish cloth, drew the knife from the sheath, and looked closely at it. Then he took the knife Simon was eating with, and the spoon, and put them all in their places, so that he could see how it looked when all the things were in the sheath. He was exceeding grave and exceeding greasy on fingers and face. Simon smiled as he looked at the little visage, so comely and so intent.

Soon after, the two eldest also made their way across to the men's bench; and the twins slipped down under the table and began crawling about there under folk's feet—then out and away to the dogs by the fire-place. There was little chance for the grown-up folk to eat in peace. The children's mother and father spoke to them, indeed, and bade them sit down prettily and be quiet; but the children paid no heed; and the parents, on their side, laughed at them the whole time and seemed to think their ill behaviour no great matter—not even when Lavrans, somewhat sharply, bade one of the serving-men take the dogs down into the room below, so that folks might be able to hear themselves speak in the upper hall.

Ramborg left the hall with her betrothed and went with him through

the spring night a little way up between the fences. Gyrd and Geirmund had ridden on ahead, and Simon stopped to say good night. He had his foot in the stirrup already—when he turned again, took her in his arms, and crushed the slender child to him so tightly that she moaned softly and happily.

"God bless you, my Ramborg—so fine and fair as you are—all too fine and fair for me," he murmured into her tangled curls.

Ramborg stood looking after him as he rode off in the misty moonlight. She rubbed her upper arm—he had grasped it so hard that it hurt her. Dizzy with joy, she thought: in three days more she would be wed to him.

Lavrans stood with Kristin before the children's bed, and watched her tucking the small bodies into their places. The eldest were big boys already, with thin bodies and slender bony limbs; but the two little ones were plump and rosy, with creases in their flesh and dimples at the joints. A fair sight they seemed to him, lying there red and warm, their thick-growing hair damp with sweat, breathing evenly in their sleep. They were healthy, comely children—but never had he seen young ones so ill brought up as these grandsons of his. 'Twas well, indeed, that Simon's sister and brother's wife had not been there that night. But maybe 'twas not for him to talk about breaking in children—— Lavrans sighed a little, and made the sign of the cross above the small heads.

So Simon Andressön drank the bride-ale with Ramborg Lavransdatter, and the wedding was in all ways fair and sumptuous. Bride and bridegroom looked joyous, and many deemed that Ramborg was lovelier on her day of honour than her sister had been—not dazzling fair, like Kristin, but far gentler and more glad; all could see in the clear innocent eyes of this bride that she bore the golden crown of the house of Gjesling with full honour this day.

And glad and proud she sat in the arm-chair before her bride-bed with hair bound up when the guests next morning came up to greet the young folk. With laughter and free jesting they looked on while Simon laid the housewife's head-dress over his young wife's head. Shouts of greeting and the clashing of arms made the rafters ring, as Ramborg rose and took her husband's hand, upright and red-cheeked under the white coif.

It was not so often that two children of great houses of the one parish were wedded—when the kindred was gone through in all its branches, the kinship would most often be found too near. So all accounted this wedding a rare and joyous festival.

6

ONE of the first things Kristin had marked at her old home was that all the old heads of men, that had stood where the verge-boards crossed at the house-gables, were gone now. Instead there had been set up spires with carven birds and foliage-work, and the new storehouse had a gilded weather-vane. The old posts of the high seat in the hearth-room house, too, had been changed for new. The old ones had been carved in the likeness of two men; ugly enough—but 'twas thought they had been there ever since the house was built, and the custom had been to smear them with fat and bathe them with ale at festivals. On the new posts her father had carved out two men with helms and shields marked with the Cross. 'Twas not St. Olav himself, said he, for it seemed to him unmeet that a sinful man should have images of the holy ones in his house, except to pray before them—but they might, he thought, be two warriors of Olav's guard. All the old carvings Lavrans had himself cut up and burnt—the serving-men dared not touch them. It was with some doubt he still let them bear out food to the great stone at Jörund's grave-mound on holy eves—but yet he deemed 'twere sin and shame to deny to the tenant of the mound what he had been used to be given ever since folk had dwelt upon the place. He had died long before Christendom had come to Norway, so it was not his fault that he was a heathen.

Folks liked these newfangled doings of Lavrans' but little. 'Twas well enough for him, who could afford to buy himself protection in other quarters. What he got seemed, indeed, to have all the virtue needed, for he had the same good fortune in husbandry as before. But there were those who asked whether yonder folk would not avenge themselves when there came a master to the manor who was less pious and not so open-handed toward the Church and all her belongings. And for small folk 'twas cheaper to give the old ones what they were used to have, rather than make foes of them and trust wholly to the priests.

Besides it was none too sure, folk deemed, how 'twould go with the friendship between Jörundgaard and the parsonage when Sira

Eirik should pass away. The priest was grown old and weakly now, so that he had need of a chaplain to help him. He had first spoken to the Bishop of his daughter's son Bentein Jonssön—but Lavrans, too, spoke to the Bishop, who was a friend of his of old. Folks deemed this misjudged. Truly it might well be that the young priest had been too forward with Kristin Lavransdatter that evening and maybe frighted the girl—but none could know that she might not herself have given some cause for the fellow's boldness. It had come out plainly enough since that she was none so coy as she had seemed. But the truth was, Lavrans had ever put too much faith in that daughter of his, adoring her almost as if she had been a sacred thing.

Afterwards there had been coldness for a time between Sira Eirik and Lavrans. But then came this Sira Solmund as chaplain, and he straightway fell at loggerheads with his parish priest over some lands, whether they belonged to the glebe or were Sira Eirik's own. Lavrans knew more than all other men in the parish of all sales of land and the like from the earliest days, and it was on his witness that the case was adjudged. Since then he and Sira Solmund had not been friends; but Sira Eirik and Audun, the old deacon, now lived at Jörundgaard, one might say; for they went thither daily and sat with Lavrans, bemoaned the wrongs and vexations they had to suffer at the hands of the new priest, and were waited on as they had been two bishops.

Kristin had already heard somewhat of all this from Borgar Trondssön of Sundbu; he had wedded a wife from the Trondheim country, and had been a guest at Husaby more than once. Trond Gjesling was dead some years ago; none deemed him much loss, for he had been a cankered shoot of the old tree, churlish, cross-grained and sickly. Lavrans was the only one who had put up with Trond; he pitied his brother-in-law, and yet more Gudrid, his wife. Now they were gone, all their four sons lived together on the manor; they were comely, bold and likely men, so folk deemed it a good exchange. There was close friendship between them and their uncle at Jörundgaard—he rode over to Sundbu a couple of times each year and went a-hunting with them in the West Hills. But Borgar had told Kristin 'twas beyond all reason, the way Lavrans and Ragnfrid tormented themselves now with penances and godliness. "He swills down water as hard as ever on fast-days; but he communes not with the ale-cup, your father, with the good old heartiness that he used," said Borgar. None could understand the man—'twas not to be believed that Lavrans had any secret sin to atone for; so far as folks

knew, he must sure have lived as Christianly as any son of Adam, saving the holy saints.

Deep down in Kristin's heart there stirred a dim surmise why her father strove thus to come near and ever nearer to his God. But she dared not think it clearly out.

She would not own to herself that she saw how changed her father was. 'Twas not that he was so greatly aged; he had kept his shapely form and his upright and gracious bearing. He was greying fast, but folk marked it not much, because his hair had always been so light in hue. And yet—her remembrance was ever haunted by the picture of the young, fair-shining man—the fresh rounding of the cheeks in the long narrow face, the clear red of the skin under the sunburn, the red full mouth with deep-cut corners. Now was the well-rounded muscular body shrunk into naught but bone and sinew, the face brown and sharp, as though carven in wood, the cheeks were flat and lean, the mouth had a knot of muscle at each corner. Aye, but then he was no young man any more—though neither, after all, was he so old.

Quiet, sedate and thoughtful he had always been, and she knew that from childhood up he had followed the commands of Christ with a rare zeal, had loved masses and prayers in the Roman tongue, and ever sought the church as the place where he found his best solace. But all had felt that a full, gentle tide of courage and joy in life flowed through the quiet man's soul. Now 'twas as though something had ebbed away from him.

She had not seen him drunken more than a single time since she came home—it was one evening of the wedding-feast at Formo. He had staggered somewhat then and been thick of speech, but he had not been out of the way merry. She remembered him as he had been in her childhood at the great ale-drinkings in festival seasons and at banquets—laughing his great laughter and slapping his thighs at each jest; offering to fight and wrestle with any man there who had a name for strength; trying horses; leaping about in the dance, and the first to laugh when his feet failed him; strewing around gifts and overflowing with goodwill and loving-kindness toward all mankind. She understood that her father had need of these great outbursts of revelry, in the midst of his steadfast labours, his strenuous fastings and his quiet home life with his own folks, who saw in him their best friend and surest stay.

She felt, too, that if her husband never had this need to drink himself drunken, 'twas because he kept so little check on himself even if he were never so sober, but ever followed his own devices without

much pondering over right and wrong or what folk accounted seemly and wise behaviour. Erlend was the most sober man as to strong drink that she had known—he drank to quench his thirst and for the sake of good-fellowship, without caring much about the matter.

But now Lavrans Björgulfssön had lost his good old heartiness over the ale-cup. No longer had he that within him which needed to be given vent in revelry. It had never come into his mind to drown his cares with hard drinking, and it came not now into his mind—to him it had ever seemed that a man should take his joy to the drinking-feast.

With his sorrows he had gone elsewhere. There was a picture which always hung dim and half-remembered in his daughter's mind—her father on that night when the church was burned. He stood beneath the crucifix that he had saved from the flames, bearing the cross and staying himself by it. Without thinking it clearly out, Kristin felt in her heart that it was in part fear for her and her children's future with the man she had chosen, and the feeling of his own helplessness in this matter, that had changed Lavrans.

This knowledge gnawed secretly at her heart. And, as it was, she had come to Jörundgaard weary of the restless winter they had spent, and of her own weakness in making no stand against Erlend's heedlessness. She knew that he was, and would ever be, a spendthrift; that he had no wit in guiding goods and gear—they dwindled under his hands slowly but ceaselessly. One thing and another she had got him to set in order as she and Sira Eiliv had counselled—but she could not evermore be speaking to him of such things; and it was tempting, too, now to give herself up to gladness with him. She was so weary of striving and struggling with all things both without her and in her own soul. And yet was she such an one that careless pleasure, too, made her careworn and fearful.

Here at home she had looked to find again the peace she had felt in her childhood under her father's safe-keeping.

But no—she felt so unsafe. Erlend had good incomings from his Wardenship, but he was living now with yet more pomp, with a greater household and the following of a great chief. And he had begun to keep her quite outside all things in his life that touched not their most private life together. She understood that he would not have her heedful eyes watching his doings. With men he would talk willingly enough of all he had seen and gone through in the north—but to her he never named it. And there were other things. He had met Lady Ingebjörg, the King's mother, and Sir Knut Porse more than once in these years; it had never so chanced at these times that she

could be with him. Sir Knut was now a Duke in Denmark, and King Haakon's daughter had bound her to him in wedlock. The marriage had waked bitter wrath in many Norsemen's minds; and steps—Kristin understood not what they were—had been taken against the lady. But the Bishop of Björgvin had sent certain chests to Husaby; they were now on board *Margygren*, and the ship lay out at Ness. Erlend had been given letters and was to sail for Denmark later in the summer. He pressed her to go with him—but she set herself against it. She knew that Erlend moved among these great folk as their equal and dear kinsman, and she feared what might come of it; 'twas unsafe with so rash a man as Erlend. But she could not pluck up heart to go with him—never could she get him to hearken to counsel there, and she was loath to adventure herself in company with folks among whom she, a plain housewife, could scarce hold her own. And then there was the terror of the sea—sea-sickness to her was a thing worse than the hardest childbed.

Thus, as she went about in her old home, her heart was tremulous and ill at ease.

One day she had gone with her father down to Skjenne. And she had seen again the precious rarity which the folk of that manor had in their keeping. 'Twas a spur of the purest gold, huge and in shape old-fashioned, with strange chasings. Like every child in the country-side, she knew where it had come from.

'Twas in the first times after St. Olav had christened the Dale that Audhild the Fair of Skjenne was spirited away into the mountain-side. They dragged the church-bell up on to the mountain and rang for the maid—and the third evening she came walking over the pastures, so decked out with gold that she shone like a star. Then the rope broke, the bell rolled down the scree, and Audhild must turn back again into the hill-side.

But many years after there came one night twelve warriors to the priest—he was the first priest that ever was in Sil. They had golden helms and silver corselets, and they rode on dark-brown stallions. 'Twas Audhild's sons by the Mountain-king, and they prayed that their mother might be given burial as a Christian woman and a grave in hallowed earth. She had striven to hold fast her faith and to keep the Church's holy days in the mountain, and she had prayed so sorely for this grace. But the priest denied it to her—folk said because of this he himself had found no rest in his grave, but in autumn nights he could be heard walking in the grove north of the

church, weeping and bemoaning his harshness. The same night Audhild's sons had appeared at Skjenne, bearing their mother's greeting to her old parents. And in the morning they found the golden spur in the court-yard. And 'twas clear that yonder folk still accounted the men of Skjenne as kin, for they had ever rare good fortune in the mountains.

Lavrans said to his daughter, as they rode homeward in the summer night:

"These Audhildssons said over the Christian prayers they had learnt of their mother. God's name and Jesu name they could not name; but they said the Lord's Prayer, and the Credo in this wise: I believe on yonder Almighty One, I believe on the only begotten Son, I believe on the most mighty Spirit. And then they said: Hail thou Lady that art the blessed one among women—and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, the Comfort of all the world——"

Kristin looked timidly up in her father's lean weather-beaten face. In the light summer night it looked so ravaged with sorrows and broodings as never before she had seen it.

"This you had never told me before," she said in a low voice.

"Had I not? Oh, no; I may have deemed it might give you heavier thoughts than your years gave you strength to bear. Sira Eirik says it is written in the books of St. Paul the Apostle: not Manhome alone groaneth in travail——"

One day Kristin sat sewing on the topmost step of the stair to the upper hall, when Simon came riding into the court-yard and stopped just below her, but saw her not. Her parents both came out to him. No, Simon would not alight; Ramborg had but bidden him ask, as he was passing by here—the sheep that had been her pet lamb, they would scarce have sent it to the hills; she would fain have it with her now.

Kristin heard her father smite his hand to his head. Aye, Ramborg's sheep—— He gave an angry laugh. An ill thing, this—he had hoped she had forgotten it. For he had given his two eldest grandsons a little hatchet each; and the first thing they had used them for was to slaughter Ramborg's sheep.

Simon laughed a little:

"Aye, the Husaby boys—a rascal crew they are——!"

Kristin ran down the stairway, loosing her silver scissors from its belt-chain:

"Give Ramborg this in amends for my sons' killing her sheep—I

know she has wanted this ever since she was small. None shall say that my sons——" She had spoken hotly, and now she fell suddenly silent. She had seen her father's and mother's faces—they looked on her gravely and wonderingly.

Simon made no motion to take the scissors; he seemed somewhat abashed. Then he caught sight of Björgulf and, riding across to him, leaned over and lifted the boy to the saddle-bow in front of him: "So —you're a Viking harrying our coasts? Well, now are you my prisoner, and to-morrow your parents can come over to me and we will bargain about your ransom——"

Therewith he waved laughingly to the others and rode off, with the boy struggling and laughing in his arms. Simon had come to be right good friends with Erlend's sons; Kristin remembered that he had ever had a way with children; her little sisters had loved him. It vexed her strangely that he should be so fond of children and have such a turn for playing with them, when her husband was ever so loath to hearken to children's talk.

The day after, though, when they were at Formo, she could see well that Simon's wife had given him small thanks for bringing this guest home with him.

"No one could look that Ramborg should greatly care for children now," said Ragnfrid. "She is scarce out of childhood yet, herself. She will change, I warrant, as she grows older."

"Doubtless she will." Simon and his mother-in-law exchanged a glance and the slightest of smiles. Ah, thought Kristin—aye, 'twas nigh on two months from the wedding now. . . .

In the trouble and unease of mind that Kristin now suffered, she was apt to vent her disquiet on Erlend. He took this sojourn on the manor of his wife's father contentedly and happily, like a man with conscience at ease. He was good friends with Ragnfrid, and made no secret of his hearty love for his wife's father. Lavrans, too, seemed fond of his son-in-law. But so sore and watchful was Kristin now grown that she felt that in Lavrans' kindness for Erlend there was much of that pitying tenderness that Lavrans had always had for every living thing that seemed to him in some measure unfit to stand on its own feet. His love for his other daughter's husband was not of this kind—Simon could meet him as a friend and comrade.

Simon and Erlend, too, were good friends when they met, but they sought not each other's company. Kristin still felt a secret shrinking from Simon Darre—both by reason of what he knew of her, and still

more because she knew that from that day at Oslo he had come off with honour and Erlend with shame. She raged at the thought that even this Erlend should be able to forget. Thus she was not ever good-humoured with her husband. And if Erlend chanced to be in the mood to bear her testiness good-humouredly and with meekness, it vexed her that he took her words so little to heart. Another day it might chance that his temper was short, and then he would grow hot, and she would answer him coldly and bitterly.

One evening they sat in the hearth-room house at Jörundgaard. Lavrans still felt most at home in this house, most of all in rainy weather when the air was heavy, as to-day, for in the great hall the roof was flat, and the smoke from the fire-place was a plague; but in the hearth-room the smoke rose up and hung under the roof-tree even when they had to shut the vent-hole against the weather.

Kristin sat by the hearth, sewing; she was moody and dull. Over against her, Margret was half asleep over her seam, and yawned now and then; the children were romping noisily in the room. Ragnfrid was at Formo, and the most of the serving-folk were gone out. Lavrans sat in his high-seat, and Erlend at the upper end of the outer bench; they had the chess-board between them, and moved the pieces in silence and after much pondering. Once when Ivar and Skule seemed set on pulling a puppy into two pieces betwixt them, Lavrans rose and took the shrieking little beast from them; he said nothing, but sat down again to the game holding the puppy in his lap.

Kristin went over to them and stood with a hand on her husband's shoulder, watching the game. Erlend had much less skill as a chess-player than his father-in-law, and most often lost when they played in the evenings; but he took such things with careless good humour. This evening he played yet worse than was his wont. Kristin chid him for it once or twice—not too mildly and sweetly. Then Lavrans said at last, somewhat testily:

"How should Erlend keep his thoughts on the game, while you stand thus disturbing him? What would you here, Kristin? You have never had any skill of these games."

"No; I trow you folks think I have no understanding of aught——"

"Of one thing I see you have no understanding," said her father sharply, "and that is how it beseems a wife to speak to her husband. Better were it you should go and keep your young ones in bounds—the din they make is worse than the Wild Hunt."

Kristin went and set up her children in a row on the bench and sat down beside them.

"Be still now, my sons," she said. "Your grandfather likes not that you should romp and play in here."

Lavrans looked at his daughter, but said no word. Soon after, the foster-mothers came in, and Kristin, the maids and Margret went out with the children to put them to bed. Erlend said, when he was alone with his father-in-law:

"I could have wished, father-in-law, that you had not chidden Kristin as you did. If it comfort her to pick at me when she is in ill humour, why—it boots not to speak to her, and she will not suffer any to say a word about her children——"

"And you," asked Lavrans, "mean you to suffer your sons to grow up so uncorrected? Where are they got to, the maids that should keep the children by them and see to them——?"

"To your serving-men's quarters, I warrant," said Erlend, laughing and stretching himself. "But I dare not say a word to Kristin about her serving-maids—she grows wroth in earnest then, and casts it in my teeth that she and I have scarce been a pattern for others."

The day after, as Kristin went plucking strawberries along a meadow south of the manor, her father called to her from the smithy-door, and bade her come to him.

Kristin went, somewhat against the grain. 'Twas Naakkve again, likely—this morning he had left a gate open and the home cattle had gotten into the barley-field.

Her father took a red-hot iron from the forge and laid it on the anvil. The daughter sat and waited, and for long there was no sound but the strokes of the hammer, as they beat the sparking iron into a pot-hook, and the answering clang of the anvil. At last Kristin asked what he would with her.

The iron was cold now. Lavrans put from him tongs and sledge-hammer and came to her. With the soot on his face and hair, his clothes and hands black, and the great leathern apron in front of him, he looked sterner than was his wont.

"I called you to me, my daughter, to say to you this: Here in my house you must show your wedded husband such reverence as beseems a wife. I will not hear my daughter speak to her master as you answered and spoke to Erlend yesterday."

" 'Tis somewhat new, Father, that you should deem Erlend to be a man to whom folks should show reverence."

"He is *your* man," said Lavrans. "I put not force upon you either to bring about your match with him. That you should bear in mind."

"You two are such warm friends," answered Kristin. "Had you known him then as you know him now, doubtless you would have been fain to put force on me."

Her father looked down at her, gravely and sadly:

"Now do you speak overhastily, Kristin, and say that which you know is untrue. I tried not to put force upon you, even when you were bent on throwing off your lawful betrothed husband, though you know that I loved Simon heartily——"

"No—but since Simon too would have none of *me*——"

"Nay. He was too high-minded to stand stiffly on his rights, seeing you were unwilling. But I know not if in his heart 'twould have gone so much against him had I done as Andres Darre would have had me—paid no heed to the wilfulness of you two young folks. And I could wellnigh doubt whether Sir Andres was not right—now when I see that you cannot live in seemly wise with the husband you set all at naught to win——"

Kristin laughed aloud, an ugly laugh:

"Simon! Never would you have forced Simon to take for wife the woman whom he had found with another man in such a house——"

Lavrans caught his breath. "House?" he gasped out.

"Aye—a house such as you men call a bordel. She that owned it—she had been Munan's paramour—she warned me herself that I should not go thither. I said I went to meet my kinsman—I knew not that he was *her* kinsman——" She laughed again, a wild, cruel laugh.

"Be silent!" said the father.

He stood still a moment. A shiver passed over his face—a smile that seemed to blanch it. There came to her the thought of a wooded hill-side—how it whitens when a storm-gust turns over all its leaves in a wave of palely glittering light:

"He learns much, that questions not——"

Kristin huddled down where she sat on the bench, leaning on one elbow, and hiding her eyes with the other hand. For the first time in her life she was in fear of her father—in deadly fear.

He turned him from her, went and took up the sledge, and put it in its place amongst the other hammers. Then he gathered together files and other small tools, and set himself to placing them in order on the cross-beam between the walls. He stood with his back to her; his hands shook violently.

"Have you never thought, Kristin—that Erlend kept silence about this?" He stood before her, looking down into her white frighted face. "I gave him no for an answer, curtly enough, when he came to

me at Tunsberg with his rich kinsmen and made suit for you—I knew not then that I should have been but too thankful that he was willing to restore my daughter's honour.—Many men would have let me know it then. . . .

"*He* came again and made suit for you in full honour. Not all men would have been so steadfast in striving to win to wife one who was already—was already—what you then were."

"*That* I trow no man had dared to tell to you——"

"'Tis not of cold steel that Erlend has ever been afraid——" Lavrans' face had grown unspeakably weary; his voice had gone hollow and dead. But soon he spoke again quietly and firmly:

"Ill as all this has been, Kristin—methinks 'tis worst of all that you should tell it, now he is your husband and the father of your sons——

"If it be as you say, you knew the worst of him before you braved all things that you might wed him. And he was willing to buy you at as great a price as though you had been an honest maid. Much freedom to rule your life and manage your affairs has he given you—therefore should you make amends for your sin by managing with understanding, and making up for what Erlend lacks in prudence—so much do you owe to God and your children.

"I have said myself—and others have said the same—that Erlend seemed not to be fit for aught else than to beguile women. You are answerable in part for such things being said—to that you have now yourself borne witness. Since then, he has shown that after all he *was* fit for somewhat else—your husband has won himself a good name for a bold and swift leader in war. 'Tis no small gain for your sons that their father has won fame for boldness and skill in arms. That he was—unwise—*you* should have known best of all of us. Best may you make amends for your shame by honouring and helping the husband yourself have chosen——"

Kristin had bent forward over her lap, her head in her hands. Now she looked up, wildly and despairingly:

"Cruel was it of me to tell you this. Oh—Simon begged me—'twas the only thing he begged of me—that I should spare you the knowledge of the worst——"

"Simon bade you spare me——?" She heard the suffering in his voice. And she knew this, too, was cruel of her, to tell him that a stranger had seen she needed to be bidden spare her father.

Then Lavrans sat down by her, took one of her hands between both of his, and laid them on his knee.

"Cruel it was, my Kristin," he said gently and sadly. "Kind are

you to all, my child, my treasure, but—I have seen it before this too—you can be cruel to them you love too dear. For Jesu sake, Kristin, spare me from the need of going in such fear for you—fear that this wild heart of yours will yet bring more sorrow over you and yours. You tug and strain like a young horse when 'tis first tied up to the stake, wherever you are tied by your heart-strings."

Sobbing, she sank against him, and her father drew her into his arms and held her close and firmly. They sat thus a long while, but Lavrans said no more. At last he lifted up her head.

"Now you are all black," he said with a little smile. "There is a cloth in yonder corner—but 'tis like it would but make you blacker. You must go home and make you clean again—anyone can see you have been sitting in the smith's lap——"

He pushed her gently out of the door, closed it behind her, and stood still a space. Then he staggered the few steps across to the bench, sank down on it and sat with head thrown back against the log wall and upturned, distorted face. With all his force he pressed one hand against his heart.

Well that it never lasted long. The breathlessness, the black dizziness, the pain shooting out through the limbs from the heart that struggled and shook, gave one or two heavy thuds, and then stood quivering still again. The blood hammering in the neck-veins.

'Twould pass in a little while. It passed always when he had sat still a little. But it came again, more and more often.

Erlend had trysted his ship's crew to meet at Veöy * on the eve of St. James' Mass, but he tarried at Jörundgaard a little longer to go with Simon and hunt down a big bear that had been harrying the sæter cattle. When he came home from the hunt, he found word awaiting him that his men had fought with the townsmen and he must hasten thither to bail them out. Lavrans had an errand in those parts, so he rode along with his son-in-law.

It was nigh the end of the Olav's Mass feast when they came out to the island. Erlend Vidkunssön's ship lay there, and at evensong in Peter's Church they met the High Steward. He came with them to the monastery where Lavrans had taken lodging, ate supper with them there, and sent his men down to the ship to fetch some rarely good French wine he had gotten at Nidaros.

But the talk went but haltingly over the wine. Erlend sat wrapped in his own thoughts, his eyes bright and eager, as ever when a new

* Note 13.

venture was before him, but unheedful of the others' speech. Lavrans but sipped the wine, and Sir Erling was quiet and said little.

"You look weary, kinsman," said Erlend to him.

Aye, they had had heavy weather crossing Husastadviken the night before; he had been up——

"And you must ride hard if you would be at Tunsberg by Lawrence Mass day. And much rest or solace you will scarce find there either. Is Master Paal with the King now——?"

"Aye. Do you touch at Tunsberg on your way?"

"To ask if the King would have me bear his loving and duteous greetings to his mother?" Erlend laughed. "Or if Bishop Audfinn would send word by me to the Lady——?"

"Many wonder that you should be journeying to Denmark, now that the chief men of the kingdom are gathering to the meeting at Tunsberg," said Sir Erling.

"Aye, is it not strange that folk must ever be wondering at me? Surely 'tis no marvel if I have a mind to see a little of such manners and breeding as I have not seen since I was last in Denmark—to ride in a tourney once again—and since our kinswoman has bidden us to come. You know well that none other of her kindred in this land will avow her now, save only Munan and I."

"Munan——" Erling frowned, and then laughed. "Is there so much life left in the old boar, I had wellnigh asked, that he can still move his brawn about?—So Duke Knut is to hold a tourney. Doubtless, then, Munan is to ride in the jousting?"

"Aye—'tis pity of you, Erling, that you cannot bear us company and see that sight." Erling, too, laughed. "I mark well that you fear Lady Ingebjörg has bidden us to this christening-ale so that we may brew the ale for another feast and bid her to it. Nay, you should know best that I am too heavy-handed and too light at heart to be of use in hatching plots. And you have drawn every tooth in Munan's head——"

"Oh, no, we are not so fearful either of plots from that quarter. Methinks it must be clear as day to Ingebjörg Haakonsdatter now that she made forfeit of all rights in her own land when she wedded with the Porse. 'Twill be a hard matter for her to get a foot inside our doors, now she has laid her hand in that man's whose least finger we will never suffer in our affairs."

"Aye, 'twas wisely done of you, indeed, to part the boy from his mother," said Erlend darkly. "He is but a child yet—and already

have we Norsemen cause to hold our heads high when we think of the King we have sworn fealty to——"

"Be still!" said Erling Vidkunssön, low and vehemently. "It—for sure it is untrue——"

Erlend said:

" 'Tis whispered in every manor and in every cabin in our north country that Christ's Church burned because our King is unworthy to sit in St. Olav's seat——"

"In God's name, Erlend—I say 'tis unsure whether it be true. And if it were, a child, like King Magnus, we must sure believe is without sin in God's eyes—he can redeem himself—— Say you that *we* have parted him from his mother? I say, God punish that mother who betrays her son as Ingebjörg betrayed hers—and put not your trust in such an one, Erlend—bear in mind that they are faithless folk you journey now to meet!"

"Methinks they have kept faith with each other fairly enough.—But, as for you, you talk as if letters from Heaven dropped every day into your lap—'tis that, maybe, makes you so bold to fight with the Lords of the Church."

"Nay, let us have an end of this, Erlend. Talk of things you have wit to understand, boy, and else be silent."—Sir Erling had risen, and he and Erlend stood face to face, red with anger.

"Oh, take heed to your tongue, Erlend," he went on in a little. "Think twice before you speak, where you are going. And think, and think again twenty times, before you do aught——"

"If 'tis so that *you* do, you who rule the roost here, then I marvel not that all things move but haltingly. But you need not be afraid," he yawned. "I—shall do naught, I trow. But 'tis grown a rare land to live in now, this of ours——

"Aye—you are setting forth early to-morrow. And my father-in-law is weary——"

The two others sat on in silence, after he had bidden them good night.—Erlend was sleeping aboard his ship.—Erling Vidkunssön sat turning his goblet between his fingers.

"You are coughing?" he said, that he might say somewhat.

"Old men grow full of rheum so easily. We have many plagues, you see, my lord, that you young folk know naught of," said Lavrans, smiling.

Again they were silent, till Erling Vidkunssön said, as though half to himself:

"Aye—so think all men—that this land is ill guided. Six years ago at Oslo I deemed I had seen clearly that there was a firm intent to uphold the kingly power—among the men of the houses to whom that duty falls by birth. I—built upon that."

"I believe you saw rightly, my lord. But you said yourself—we are used to rally round our King—and now our King is a child—and half the time in a foreign land——"

"Aye. There be times when I think—nothing is so ill but it is in some ways good. In the old times, when our Kings bore them like wild stallions—there was store of brave foals to rear; our folk needed but to choose the one that was the best fighter——"

Lavrans laughed a little: "Oh, aye——"

"We talked together three years ago, Lavrans Lagmandssön, when you came back from pilgrimage to Skövde and had seen your kinsfolk in Gautland——"

"I remember, my lord, you did me the honour to seek me out."

"Nay, nay, Lavrans, no need for so much *kurteisi*." He struck out a little impatiently with his hand. "'Tis even as I said then," he went on gloomily. "None now can bring together the nobles of this land. *They* push to the front that are most fain to fill their bellies—there is yet some meat left in the trough. But they that might aspire to win might and riches by such service as was held in honour in our fathers' days, they come not forth!"

"So would it seem. True it is that honour follows the banner of the chief."

"Then men must deem, I trow, that with my banner there follows little honour," said Erling dryly. "You, too, have held aloof from all that might have made you a name, Lavrans Lagmandssön."

"So have I done ever since I have been a wedded man, my lord. I was wedded early—my wife was sickly, her health could not bear much going about in company. And it seems as if our stock doth not thrive here in Norway. My sons died early, and only one of my brother's sons lived to a man's age."

They sat again in silence awhile.

"Such men as Erlend—" said the High Steward low, "they are the most dangerous. They that have thoughts that go a little farther than their own concerns—but not far enough. Aye, is he not like an idle child, this Erlend——?" He shoved his wine-cup round about on the table in his vexation. "He is no dullard! And he has birth and valour. But never doth he trouble to hear so much of any matter as to understand it through and through.—And should he ever care

to hear a man out, he had forgot the beginning, like enough, before one got to the end——"

Lavrans looked across at the other. Sir Erling had aged much since last he had seen him. He looked worn and weary—seemed not to fill his seat so fully as before. He had fine, clear-cut features, but they were a little too small, and his hue was, as it were, a little faded—had been so always. Lavrans felt that this man—though he was an upright, knightly man, prudent, and willing to serve faithfully and unflinchingly—yet, however measured, was somewhat too small to be the first man in the realm. Had he been a head taller, 'twas like he would more easily have found full following.

Lavrans said low:

"Sir Knut, too, be sure, is wise enough to see this—if they are hatching aught down there—that in any secret counsels he would find Erlend of small use——"

"You like this son-in-law of yours in a fashion, Lavrans," said the other, almost testily. "Though, truth to tell, cause to love him you have not——"

Lavrans sat drawing with his finger on the table in some spilled wine. Sir Erling marked how loosely the rings sat on his fingers now.

"Have *you* cause?" Lavrans looked up with his faint smile. "And yet I trow that you like him, too."

"Oh, aye. God knows——

"But you may make your oath, Lavrans, many things are running in Sir Knut's head now—he is father of a son that is King Haakon's grandson."

"Aye, but even Erlend must sure understand that that child's father has all too broad a back for the little lordling ever to be able to get around it. And the mother has our whole country against her because of this marriage."

A little while after, Erling Vidkunssön stood up and buckled on his sword; Lavrans had courteously taken his guest's cloak from the hook where it hung, and stood with it in his hands—then of a sudden he swayed and would have fallen to the ground, had not Sir Erling caught him in his arms. With much pains and labour he managed to bear the other, a big, tall man, over to the bed. A stroke it was not—but Lavrans lay there, his lips blue and white, with slack, strengthless limbs. Sir Erling ran across the yard and waked up the hospice-father.

Lavrans seemed much abashed when he came to himself. Aye, it was a weakness that took hold on him now and then—'twas from an

elk-hunt he had been on two winters back—he had lost his way in a snowstorm. Maybe something like this was ever needed to teach a man his youth is gone from him—he smiled in excuse.

Sir Erling tarried till the monk had bled the sick man, though Lavrans prayed him not to trouble himself, seeing that he was to set forth at daybreak. . . .

The moon shone bright, riding high above the hills of the mainland, and the water lay black in their shadow, but out on the fjord the light floated in flakes of silver. No smoke from any vent-hole—the grass on the house-roofs glittered with dew in the moonlight. Not a human soul in the one short street of the little town, as Sir Erling walked swiftly the short space, but a few steps, to the King's mansion, where he slept. He looked strangely slim and small in the moonlight —with the black cloak gathered closely about him—shivering a little. A pair of sleepy serving-men, who had sat up for him, came tumbling out into the court-yard with a lanthorn. The High Steward took the lanthorn and sent the men to bed—he shivered a little again as he climbed the staircase to the storehouse-loft, where he was to sleep.

7

A LITTLE after Bartholomew Mass, Kristin set out on her homeward journey, with her great company of children and serving-folk, and all their baggage. Lavrans rode with her to Hjerdkinn.

They walked up and down the court-yard in talk, he and his daughter, the morning he was to set forth down the Dale again. The hill country round them lay in sparkling sunshine—the mosses were red already, and the knolls yellow as gold with the birch-copses; out on the upland wastes, tarns glittered and grew dark again, as the shadows of the great shining fair-weather clouds floated across them. They kept rolling up unceasingly, and sank down over the distant clefts and glens, amidst all the grey-stone peaks, and blue mountains with combs of new snow, and old snowfields, which lay around as far as the eye could reach. The little grey-green patches of corn belonging to the rest-house stood out strangely against the autumn hues of this shining mountain world.

The wind blew fresh and sharp—Lavrans drew up the hood of Kristin's cloak, which had blown back upon her shoulders, and smoothed with his fingers the strip of linen coif that showed beneath it.

"Methinks you have grown pale and thin-cheeked in my house," said he. "Have we not taken good care of you at home, Kristin?"

"That you have. 'Tis not that——"

"Truly, too, this is a toilsome journey for you, with all these children," said her father.

"Oh, aye. Though 'tis not because of these five that my cheeks are pale——" A smile flitted over her face, and when her father looked at her questioningly, in alarm, she nodded and smiled a little again. The father looked away from her, but in a little while he asked:

"Since this is so, then maybe 'twill not be so soon that you can come home to us in the Dale again?"

"At least I hope 'twill not be eight years this time," she said in the same tone. Then she caught a glimpse of the man's face: "Father! Oh—father!"

"Hush, hush, my daughter——" Unwittingly he caught her by the

upper arm and stopped her as she would have flung herself upon him. "Nay, Kristin——"

He took her hand firmly in his, and began walking again beside her. They had come away from the houses; they were following now a little path in among the yellow birch thickets—they marked not where they were going. Lavrans jumped over a little rill that crossed the path, turned toward his daughter, and gave her his hand over.

She saw, even in this little movement, he was no longer springy and nimble as of old. She had seen before without marking it—he no longer leapt into the saddle as lightly as he had done; he ran no longer up a loft-stairway; he lifted not a heavy thing easily as he was wont to do. He bore his body more stiffly and carefully—as if he had a slumbering pain within him and went softly so as not to wake it. The blood could be seen beating in his neck-veins when he came in from riding. Sometimes she had seen what seemed swellings or pouches under his eyes—and she remembered that one morning when she came into the hall he lay half dressed in the bed with his naked legs over the bed-foot, and her mother was crouched in front of him, chafing his ankle-joints.

"Should you sorrow for every man that old age strikes down, child, much will be your mourning," he said, evenly and quietly. "You have great sons yourself now, Kristin; sure it cannot come on you unlooked for that you see your father will soon be an old fellow. When we parted in old days while I was yet young—we could not know any more then than we know now, whether 'twas to be our lot to meet again on this earth. I may yet live long—'twill be as God wills, Kristin."

"Are you sick, father?" she asked, tonelessly.

"Some ailments come with the years," answered her father, lightly.

"You are not old, father. You are but two and fifty years——"

"My father never was so old. Come and sit here by me."

There was a low grass-grown shelf under a rocky wall that leaned over the beck. Lavrans unclasped his cloak, folded it together, and, sitting on it, drew her down beside him. In front of them the beck clucked and rippled over the little stones in its bed, swaying a branch of willow that lay in the water. The father sat with his eyes fixed on the blue and white mountains far off behind the warm-hued autumn uplands.

"You are cold, Father," said Kristin; "take my cloak——" She unfastened it; and he drew the skirt of it round his shoulders, so that they both sat in its shelter. Under it he put one arm about her waist.

"You know it well, my Kristin: unwise is he that mourns a man's

going hence—let Christ have thee, rather than I—'tis like you have heard the saying. I trust firmly in God's mercy. 'Tis not so long, the time for which friends are parted. Maybe 'twill seem so to you sometimes, while yet you are young; but you have your children and your husband. When you come to my years you will deem 'tis no time since you saw us who are gone away, and you will wonder, when you reckon up the winters that have passed, that they are so many. . . . To me it seems now 'tis not long since I myself was a boy—and yet is it many years since you were the little light-haired maid that ran about after me, wherever I might stand or go—you followed your father so lovingly—God reward you, my Kristin, for the joy I had of you——"

"Aye—if He reward me as I rewarded you——" She sank on her knees before him, caught his wrists, and kissed the palms of his hands as she hid her weeping face in them. "O father, my dear father—no sooner was I a grown maid than I paid you for your love with the bitterest sorrow——"

"Nay, nay, child; weep not so." He drew his hands loose, and lifted her up beside him, and they sat as before.

"Much joy have I had of you, in these years too, Kristin. Fair and hopeful children have I seen growing up by your knee, a notable and understanding woman are you grown—and I have seen that more and more you have used yourself to seek help where it may best be had, when you were in any trouble. Kristin, my most precious gold, weep not so sorely. You may hurt him you bear under your belt," he whispered. "Nay, sorrow not so."

But he could not check her weeping. Then he lifted his daughter up into his lap and sat her on his knee; now he had her even as when she was a little one—her arms around his neck and her face pressed to his shoulder.

"There is a thing I have never told to any mother's child but to my priest—now will I tell it you. In the days when I was growing up—at home at Skog, and when first I was with the body-guard—I had a mind to take the vows, as soon as I were old enough. Nay, I made no promise, not even in my own heart. There was much that drew me the other way, too.—But when I lay out fishing in the Botn Fjord and heard the bells ring from the cloister on Hovedö—it seemed that drew me most of all.—Then, when I was sixteen years old, father had made for me that habergeon of mine of Spanish steel plates soldered with silver—Rikard the Englishman at Oslo welded it together; and I got my sword too—the one I use always, and my horse-armour. 'Twas not so peaceful in the land then as in your young years—there was war with

the Danes—and I knew I was like soon to have the chance to use my fair weapons. And I could not lay them from me.—I comforted me with the thought that my father would mislike it if his eldest son turned monk, and that I should not cross my parents.

"But 'twas I myself that made choice of the world, and I have striven to think when the world went against me: unmanful would it be to murmur at the lot I had chosen myself. For I have seen it more and more with each year I have lived—no worthier work can there be for a human soul that has found grace to conceive somewhat of God's loving-kindness, than to serve Him and watch and pray for those men whose sight is still darkened by the shadow of the things of this world. Yet must I needs say, my Kristin—hard would it be for me to give up for God's sake the life I have lived on my farms and lands, with cares for earthly things and with worldly cheer—with your mother by my side, and with you my children. Therefore must a man suffer in patience, when he has begotten offspring of his body, that it scorch his heart if he lose them or the world go badly with them. God, who gave them souls, owned them, and not I——"

Kristin's body was still shaken with weeping; and her father began rocking her in his arms like a little child.

"Many things there are that I understood not when I was young. Father held Aasmund dear too, but not so as he loved me. 'Twas for my mother's sake, you see—her he never forgot, though he took Inga because 'twas his father's will. Now would I wish that I could have met my stepmother again in this earthly home and prayed her to forgive that I set no store by her kindness——"

"But you have said often, Father, that your stepmother did you neither good nor evil," said Kristin, through her weeping.

"Aye, God help me—'twas my lack of understanding. Now does it seem a great thing to me that she hated me not, and never gave me an angry word. How would you like it, Kristin, if so it were that you saw a stepson put before your own son, at all times and in all things?"

Kristin was grown somewhat quieter. She lay now with her face turned outwards looking toward the mountain range. A great grey-blue pile of cloud was passing over the sun, darkening the air—some yellow beams stabbed through it, and a sharp glitter was thrown up from the water of the beck.

Then her tears broke out anew:

"Oh, no—father, my father—should I nevermore see you in life——"

"God guard you, Kristin, my child, so that we may find each other again on yonder day, all we who were friends in life—and every human soul.—Christ and Mary Virgin and St. Olav and St. Thomas will keep you all your days." He took her face between his hands and kissed her on the mouth. "God be gracious to you—God give you light in this world's light and in that great light hereafter——"

Some hours later, when Lavrans Björgulfssön rode off from Hjerdkinn, his daughter went with him some way, walking by his horse's side. Lavrans' man had gotten a long way ahead, but he still kept on at a foot's pace. It was grievous to look on her despairing face, all marred by weeping. So had she sat in the guest-shed too, all the time, while he ate and talked to the children, jested with them, and took them in his lap, one by one.

Lavrans said softly:

"Grieve no more for what you have to repent toward *me,* Kristin. But remember it, when your children grow big, and you may deem that they bear them not toward you or toward their father as you might think was right. And remember then, too, what I said to you of my youth. Faithful is your love to them, I know it well; but you are hardest where you love most, and I have marked that in these boys of yours dwells self-will enow," he said with a little smile.

At last Lavrans bade her turn and go back: "I would not have you go alone any farther from the houses." They were come into a hollow between little hills with birch-trees round their foot and stone screes higher up their sides.

Kristin pressed herself against her father's foot in its stirrup. She groped with her fingers over his clothes and his hand and the saddle and the horse's neck and quarters, rocked her head from side to side, and wept with such a deep lamentable sobbing that her father thought his heart must break to see her plunged in such great sorrow.

He sprang from his horse and took his daughter in his arms, holding her in his embrace for the last time. Again and again he made the sign of the cross over her and commended her to the keeping of God and the holy saints. At last he said that now she must let him go.

So they parted. But when he was gone a little way, Kristin saw that her father slackened his horse's pace, and she knew that he was weeping as he rode away from her.

She ran into the birch-wood, hastened through it, and began climbing

up over the golden lichen-covered stones of the scree on the nearest knoll. But the stones were big, and hard to climb over, and the little hill was higher than she had thought. At last she was at the top, but by that time he was gone from sight among the low hills. She laid her down in the moss and bear-berry heath that grew on the top of the knoll, and there lay long weeping, with her face hidden in her arms.

Lavrans Björgulfssön came home to Jörundgaard of an evening late. A cheering little warmth passed over him when he saw folks were still up in the hearth-room house—there was a faint flicker of firelight behind the tiny pane of glass in the pent-house wall. He had always felt that in this house was most of home.

Ragnfrid sat alone in the room with a great seam of work before her on the table—a tallow candle on a brass holder stood by her. She rose to her feet at once, bade him good evening, put more wood on the hearth-fire, and went herself to fetch food and drink. No—she had sent the maids to bed long ago—they had had a hard day; but now, at any rate, they had barley-bread ready baked to last till Yule. Paal and Gunstein had gone to the hills to gather moss. Speaking of moss—would Lavrans have his winter clothes made from the litmus-dyed web of cloth or from the heather-green? Orm of Moar had been there that morning asking to buy some leather rope. She had taken out the ropes that hung next the door in the shed, and said he could have them as a gift. Aye—his daughter was going on a little better now—the wound on her leg was healing up well. . . .

Lavrans answered or nodded, as he and his man ate and drank. But the master was soon done eating. He stood up, dried his knife on the back of his thigh, and took up a bobbin that lay by Ragnfrid's place. The thread was wound on a pin that was carven into a bird at each end—one of these had had a piece of its tail broken off. Lavrans rounded off the break, and carved a little on it, making the bird dock-tailed. At one time, long ago, he had made a great many such bobbin-pins for his wife.

"Must you mend these yourself?" he asked, looking at her work. It was a pair of his leather hose; Ragnfrid was sewing patches on the inside of the thighs, where they had been worn by the saddle. "'Tis stiff work for your fingers, Ragnfrid."

"Oh——" His wife laid the pieces of leather edge on edge and bored holes in them with her awl.

The servant bade good night and went out. Man and wife were alone. He stood by the hearth warming himself, with one foot on

the hearth-rim and a hand on the pole of the smoke-vent. Ragnfrid looked across at him. And she grew aware that the little ring with the rubies—his mother's betrothal-ring—was gone from his hand. He saw that she had marked it.

"Aye—I gave it to Kristin," said he. "It has ever been meant for her—methought 'twas as well she should have it now."

At times thereafter one of them would say to the other—maybe 'twas time they went to bed. But he stood up where he was, and she sat on at her work. They spoke some words about Kristin's journey; about work that was toward on the farm, about Ramborg and Simon. Then they said somewhat again about its being, perhaps, well to go to rest—but neither of them moved.

Then Lavrans took the gold ring with the blue and white stone from off his right hand, and went across with it to his wife. Shyly and awkwardly he took her hand and slipped the ring on to it—he had to change it once or twice before he found the finger it fitted. It came to rest on the middle finger above her wedding-ring.

"I would have you take this now," he said, low, without looking at her.

Ragnfrid sat still as a stone—her cheeks blood-red.

"Why do you this?" she whispered at last. "Think you I grudge our daughter her ring?"

Lavrans shook his head and smiled a little:

"Oh, methinks you know why I do it."

"You said before, this ring you would take with you to the grave," she said in the same whisper. "None was to bear it after you were gone——"

"Therefore must you never take it from off your hand, Ragnfrid—promise me that. I would not have any bear it after you——"

"Why do you this?" she asked again, holding her breath.

The man looked down into her face.

"Last spring 'twas four and thirty years since we were wedded to each other. I was not yet a full-grown man—and all through my manhood you were at my side, both when sorrow came and when things went well with me. God help us—all too little did I understand how heavy was the burden you bore, while we lived together. But methinks now that it ever seemed good to me that you were there. . . .

"I know not whether 'tis so that you have deemed I held Kristin dearer than you. True it is that she was my greatest joy and that she brought me my worst sorrow.—But you were mother to them all. It

seems now to me that the worst of all will be to leave you, when I go hence. . . .

"Therefore must you never give my ring to any—not to either of our daughters even—but say that they must leave it on your hand.

"Maybe you deem, wife, you have had more sorrow with me than joy—and in a way things went wrong between us; but yet methinks through all we have been faithful friends. And I have thought that hereafter we shall find each other again in such wise that the wrong will not part us any more, but the love that was between us God will build up again, better than before——"

The wife lifted her pale, furrowed face—her great sunken eyes burned as she looked up at her husband. He held her hand still; she looked at it as it lay in his, lifted a little. The three rings gleamed, one above the other—lowest down the betrothal-ring, then the wedding-ring, and above it this one.

It came over her so strangely. She remembered when he had put the first on her hand—by the hearth in the hall of her Sundbu home, their fathers standing by them. He was white and red, round-cheeked, scarce out of his boyhood—a little bashful as he stepped forward from Sir Björgulf's side.

The other he had set on her finger before the church-door at Gerdarud, in God's triune name, under the priest's hand.

She felt it—with this last ring he had wedded her again. When, in a little while, she sat over his lifeless body, he willed that she should know that with this ring he had espoused to her the strong and living force that had dwelt in that dust and ashes.

She felt as though her heart was cloven in her breast, and bled and bled, wildly as in youth—for sorrow for the warm and living love she still secretly bemoaned that she had missed, for fearful joy in this pale, shining love that drew her with it towards the uttermost bounds of the earthly life. Through the pitchy darkness that was coming she saw the glimmer of another, milder sun, she smelt the scent of the herbs in the garden at the world's end. . . .

Lavrans laid his wife's hand back in her lap, and sat down on the bench, a little way from her, with his back to the board, and one arm upon it. He looked not at her, but gazed into the hearth-fire.

When she spoke again, her voice was calm and quiet:

"I had not thought, my husband, that I had been so dear to you."

"Aye, but you were"; he spoke as evenly as she.

They sat silent awhile. Ragnfrid moved her sewing from her lap to the bench beside her. In a while she asked in a low voice:

"The thing I told you that night—have you forgotten it?"

"Such things a man cannot forget in this earthly home. And so it is, I have felt myself, that things grew not better between us after I had come to know it. Though God knows, Ragnfrid, I strove hard that you might never mark I thought so much of it——"

"I knew not that you thought so much of it."

He turned sharply toward his wife and looked at her. Then said Ragnfrid:

"'Twas my fault that things grew worse between us, Lavrans. Methought that since you could be to me in all ways as you were before —after that night—then must you have cared about me even less than I had believed. Had you grown to be a hard husband to me—had you struck me, if only once and when you were drunken—then could I have better borne my sorrow and my remorse. But that you took it so lightly——!"

"Did you deem that I took it lightly?"

The faint tremble in his voice made her wild with longing. She longed to plunge herself within him, to sound the unquiet depths from which his voice came forth strained and labouring. She flamed up:

"Aye, had you taken me in your arms one single time, not for that I was your Christian wedded wife that they had laid at your side, but that I was the wife you had longed for and fought to win—never then could you have been to me as though those words had been unspoken."

Lavrans thought a space:

"No. It—may be I could not. No."

"Had you joyed in the betrothed that was given to you, as Simon joyed in our Kristin——"

Lavrans made no answer. In a little he said softly, as though against his will and in fear:

"Why named you—*Simon?*"

"Nay, it could not come to my mind to liken you with the other," answered the wife, herself somewhat confused and fearful, but trying to smile: "You and he are too unlike."

Lavrans rose to his feet and walked a few steps, restlessly—then he said yet lower:

"God will not forsake Simon."

"Seemed it never to you," asked his wife, "as though God had forsaken *you?*"

"No."

"What were your thoughts on that night we sat there in the barn—

when you learned in *one* hour that we whom you had held dearest and loved most faithfully, we had both been false to you as we could be——"

"I thought not much, I trow," said the man.

"And since," his wife went on, "when you thought upon it always —as you say you did——"

Lavrans turned away from her. She saw a flush spread over his sunburned neck.

"I thought on all the times I had been false to Christ," he said very low.

Ragnfrid rose—she stood still a moment before she ventured to go to her husband and lay her hands on his shoulders. When he put his arms around her, she bowed her forehead against his breast; he felt that she was weeping. He drew her close in to him and pressed his face down on her head.

"Now, Ragnfrid, we will go to rest," he said in a little.

Together they went over to the crucifix, bowed before it, and crossed themselves. Lavrans said over the evening prayers; he spoke, low and clearly, in the Church's tongue, and his wife spoke the words after him.

They took off their clothes. Ragnfrid lay down on the inner side of the bed—the pillows were made up now much lower than of old, because her husband in these latter days had been often troubled with dizziness. Lavrans bolted and barred the room-door, scraped ashes over the fire on the hearth, blew out the light, and lay down beside her. They lay in the darkness, their arms touching. In a little the fingers of their hands twined together.

Ragnfrid Ivarsdatter thought—'twas like a new bridal night, and a strange bridal night. Happiness and unhappiness flowed together and lifted her up on waves so mighty that she felt within her now the first loosening of the roots of her soul—now had death's hand given her, too, a wrench—the first time.

"Speak to me, Lavrans," she prayed him softly. "I am so weary——"

The man whispered:

"*Venite ad me, omnes qui laboratis et onerati estis. Ego reficiam vos*,* hath the Lord said."

He passed an arm around her shoulders and drew her in to his side. They lay a little, cheek against cheek. Then she said softly:

* Matthew xi, 28.

"Now have I prayed God's Mother to make for me this prayer, that I may not outlive you, my husband, many days."

His lips and eyelashes touched her cheek in the darkness as lightly as the touch of butterflies' wings.

"My Ragnfrid, my Ragnfrid——"

8

KRISTIN stayed at home at Husaby this autumn and winter and would go nowhither—she gave for a reason that she was ailing. But she was only tired. So tired she had never been before in her life—tired of being merry and tired of sorrowing, and tired, most of all, of brooding.

It would be better when this new child had come, she thought—she longed much for it; it was as though it was to be the saving of her. If it were a son, and her father died before its birth, it should bear his name. And she thought how she would love this child, and nurse it at her own breast—it was so long since she had nursed a child that she could weep with longing when she thought that now she should soon have a suckling in her arms again.

She gathered her sons about her knee again as she had been used to do in early days, and strove to make their upbringing somewhat more orderly and mannerly. She felt that in this she was obeying her father's wish, and this brought some peace into her soul. Sira Eiliv had begun now to teach Naakkve and Björgulf their letters and the Latin tongue, and Kristin often sat over in the priest's house when the children were there at their book. But as scholars they showed not much thirst for knowledge, and all the children were wild and unruly, save Gaute alone, so that he still was his mother's poppet, as Erlend called it.

Erlend came back from Denmark about All Saint's tide, in high feather. He had been entertained with the greatest honour by the Duke and his kinswoman Lady Ingebjörg; they had thanked him right heartily for his gifts of silver and furs; he had ridden in the jousts, and chased the hart and the hind; and when they parted, Sir Knut had bestowed on him a coal-black Spanish stallion, while the Lady had sent loving greetings and two silver-grey greyhounds to his wife. Kristin deemed that these outlandish hounds looked faithless and treacherous, and she was afraid they might do her children hurt. And the folk all through the country-side talked much of the Castilian steed. 'Twas true, Erlend looked well on the long-legged, light-built horse; but such beasts suited not this northern land, and God only knew how the stallion would get about on the hill-paths. Howbeit,

Erlend bought up now, wherever he went about in his charge, the bravest black mares, till he had made him a stud that was fair to look on at the least. In other days Erlend Nikulaussön had used to give his riding-horses fine outlandish names: Belkolor and Bayard and suchlike; but this horse, he said, was so rare a beast that he needed no such adornment—plain Soten * should be his name.

Erlend chafed much that his wife would not go about with him anywhither. Sick he could not mark that she was—she neither swooned away nor vomited this time—no sign was to be seen upon her yet—and most like her paleness and weariness were from evermore sitting indoors brooding and pondering over his misdeeds. Yule-tide came round—and hot quarrels arose between them. And now Erlend no longer came afterward to beg forgiveness for his hot temper, as he had ever used to do before. Till now he had thought always, when there was strife between them, that 'twas he was at fault. Kristin was good; she was ever in the right; and if he wearied and was ill at ease in his home, it was but that his nature was such that he grew weary of what was good and right when he had too much of it. But last summer he had marked more than once that his father-in-law held with him, and seemed to deem that Kristin was lacking in wifely gentleness and forbearance. And then it came into his thought that she took things to heart in a petty way and was hardly brought to forgive him small misdeeds that had not been so ill meant on his part. Always had he prayed her for forgiveness when he had had time to think—and she had said that she forgave, but afterward he had been made to see that 'twas hidden away, but not forgotten.

So he was much from home, and now he often took his daughter Margret with him. The maid's upbringing had ever been one of the things that set them at odds. Kristin had never said aught of it, but Erlend knew well what she—and others—thought. He had dealt with Margret in all ways as she had been his true-born child, and folk made her welcome as though she were such when she went about with her father and stepmother. At Ramborg's wedding she had been one of the bridesmaids, and had borne a golden garland on her flowing hair. Many of the women liked this but ill, but Lavrans had talked them round, and Simon, too, had said that none must say aught against it to Erlend or speak of it to the maid herself—'twas not the fair child's fault that she was so luckless in her birth. But Kristin saw that Erlend had planned to wed Margret to an esquire bearing arms, and that he believed, with the standing he now had, he would be able to

* Soten = Soot.

bring this about, although the maid was begotten in adultery, and 'twould be a hard matter to win for her a safe, firm footing amongst good folk. It might, perchance, have been done if folk had felt any right faith that Erlend had it in him to keep up and increase the might and riches of his house. But though Erlend was liked and honoured after a fashion, 'twas as though no one had full faith that the fair fortunes of Husaby would endure. Thus Kristin feared he would be hard put to it to bring his plans for Margret to a good end. And though she liked not Margret overmuch, yet she pitied the maid, and dreaded the day when, maybe, her pride must be broken—if she must be content with a much humbler match than her father had taught her to look for, and quite another way of life than the one he had nurtured her in.

Thus things were, when just after Candlemas three men from Formo came to Husaby; they had come across the hills on ski in haste, bringing Erlend letters from Simon Andressön. Simon wrote that their father-in-law had now fallen so sick that 'twas not to be looked for that he could live long; and that Lavrans had bade him pray that Erlend would come to Sil if 'twere possible for him; he was fain to have speech with his two sons-in-law of how all things should be ordered when he was gone.

Erlend went about casting stolen glances at his wife. She was far gone with child now, pale and thin-faced—and she looked so sorrowful—every moment the tears would be welling up. He began to repent his behaviour to her in the winter—her father's sickness had not come on her unlooked for, and if so it was that she had had to bear about this secret sorrow, he could better forgive her unreasonable ways.

Alone he could have made the journey to Sil and back swiftly enough, going on ski across the mountains. But if he took his wife with him, 'twould be a slow and toilsome business. And then he would need to tarry till after the wapinschaws * in Lent, and set trysts there with his sheriffs; and there were some meetings, too, that he must attend himself. Before they could set forth, 'twould be perilously near the time she looked to be delivered—and Kristin, too, who could nowise endure the sea even when she was well! But he was loath to think of her not seeing her father before he died. In the evening, when they had lain down, he asked her if she dared make the journey.

It seemed to him he was well repaid when she threw herself weeping in his arms, full of thankfulness, and of penitence for her unfriendliness toward him in the winter. Erlend grew soft and tender, as he ever was when he had brought grief to a woman and had to see her

* Wapinschaw = Arms-muster.

sorrow it out before his eyes; and he bore well enough afterward with Kristin's fantasies. He had said from the first, the children he would not have with them. But the mother would have it that Naakkve was so great a boy now, 'twould be well for him to see his grandfather's going hence. Erlend said: No. Then she was sure that Ivar and Skule were too small to be left behind in the serving-women's charge. No, said their father. And then Lavrans had been so fond of Gaute. No, said Erlend—'twas hard enough as it was—things being as they were with her—for Ragnfrid to have a childbirth in the house, while her husband lay on his sick-bed—and for themselves on the journey homeward with a new-born babe. Either must she give the child out to nurse on one of Lavrans' farms, or she must tarry at Jörundgaard till 'twas summer—but then he must come home before her. He had to put all this to her, over and over again; but he strove to speak calmly and reasonably.

Then he bethought him that he should take from Nidaros one thing and another that his mother-in-law might need for the grave-ale—wine and wax, wheat flour and millet and the like. But at length they were ready to set forth, and they came to Jörundgaard the day before Gertrude's Mass.

But Kristin found 'twas far otherwise than she had thought to be at home at this time.

She should have rejoiced with all her heart that it had been given her to see her father once again. And when she remembered his joy at her coming and how he had thanked Erlend for it, she was indeed glad. But she felt that she was shut out now from so much that passed, and this hurt her.

It was but a short month before her time; and Lavrans utterly forbade that she should have the least hand in nursing or tending him; they would not let her watch by him at night in turn with the others, nor would her mother suffer her to move a finger toward helping in all the press of work. She sat by her father all day, but 'twas seldom that they were alone at any time. Almost daily there came guests to the house—friends come to see Lavrans Björgulfssön once again in life. These visits pleased her father, though they made him exceeding weary. He talked heartily and cheerfully with all, men and women, rich and poor, young and old—thanked them for their friendship, asked their prayers for his soul—and God grant that we may meet on the day of bliss! At night, when only his own folk were with him, Kristin lay above in the upper hall, staring into the dark, and could

not sleep for thinking on her father's going and on her own heart's folly and wickedness.

Lavrans' end was swiftly drawing nigh. He had kept himself up and about till Ramborg had borne her child, and there was no more need for Ragnfrid to be so much at Formo; he had had himself driven down there one day and seen his daughter and granddaughter; Ulvhild the little maid had been called. But after that he took to bed, and it was not likely he would ever rise again.

He lay in the great room under the upper hall. They had made a kind of bed for him there on the bench of the high seat, for he could not endure to have his head pillowed high—when it was so, he grew dizzy at once and had swooning-fits and heart-spasms. They dared not let him blood any more; they had had to do it so often all through the autumn and winter that now he was quite drained of blood; and he could eat and drink but little.

Her father's fine and comely features were sharp now, and the brownness was faded from his face that had weathered before to so fresh a hue; it was yellow now as bone, and the lips and corners of the eyes pale and bloodless. The thick hair, flaxen but powdered with white, lay unclipped, withered and strengthless over the blue-patterned pillow-cover, but what changed him most was the coarse grey stubble growing now on the lower face and on the long wide throat, where the sinews stood out like strong chords. Lavrans had always been so nice in shaving himself before each holy day. His body was wasted till it was but little more than a skeleton. But he said that he was easy so long as he lay stretched out and moved but little. And he was cheerful and glad at all times.

They slaughtered and brewed and baked for the grave-ale; had out bed-gear for all the beds and went through it with care—all that could be got out of hand now was done, so that all might be still and quiet when the last struggle came. It cheered Lavrans greatly to hear of all that was making ready—his last feast would not be the least of all the festivals that had been held at Jörundgaard; in honour and worship would he depart from the governance of his lands and his people. One day he had a mind to see the two cows that were to follow in his funeral train, as gifts for Sira Eirik and Sira Solmund; and they were led into the hall. They had been given double feed all the winter, and they were, in sooth, as fine and fat as sæter cattle at Olav's Mass, though it was now the midst of the spring dearth. He was the one that laughed most when one of them dropped somewhat on the hall-floor.—But he was fearful that his wife would be altogether

worn out. Kristin had thought she herself was a notable housewife —she had the name of one at home in Skaun; but it seemed to her now that beside her mother she was naught. None could understand how Ragnfrid was able to compass all she did—and yet she seemed never to be long away from her husband; and she took her share of watching every night.

"Never trouble about me, husband," she said, laying her hand in his. "When you are dead, you know that I shall rest altogether from all such cares."

Lavrans Björgulfssön had bought him some years back a resting-place in the church of the Preaching Friars at Hamar, and Ragnfrid Ivarsdatter was set on going thither with his corpse and dwelling there near by it; she was to be a commoner in a hospice the monks owned in the town. But first the coffin was to be taken into the Olav's Church here at home, with great gifts to the Church and the priests; his stallion was to be led after with his armour and weapons, and these were to be redeemed by Erlend for five and forty marks of silver. One of his and Kristin's sons would most like be given these things—for choice the child she was soon to bear, if 'twere a son—perhaps he might some day be Lavrans of Jörundgaard, said the sick man with a smile. On the way down through Gudbrandsdal, too, the body was to be taken into certain churches overnight—and these were all remembered in Lavrans' testament with money-gifts and wax tapers.

Kristin felt sick, but it was with sorrow and disquiet of soul. For she could not hide from herself—it hurt her the more, the longer she was at home. Such was her heart that it hurt her to see that, now her father was drawing nigh to death, 'twas his wife that was nearest to him of all.

Ever had she heard her parents' life together held up as a pattern of seemly and worthy wedlock in unity, troth and loving-kindness. But she had felt, though without thinking upon it, that none the less there was somewhat that stood between them—an uncertain shadow, but it dulled the life in their house, though they lived together in peace and kindness. Now was there no shadow any more between her parents. They talked evenly and quietly together, mostly of the little things of every day; but Kristin felt that there was something new in their eyes and in the tone of their voices. She saw that her father missed his wife always when she was not by his side. When he had himself talked her over into going to seek a little rest, he

would lie as if waiting somewhat restlessly; and when she came in, 'twas as though peace and gladness came with her to the sick man. One day she heard them speaking of their dead children; yet did they look happily. When Sira Eirik came over and read to Lavrans, Ragnfrid sat ever beside them, and then he would often take his wife's hand, and lie playing with her fingers and turning the rings on them.

She knew that her father loved her not less than before. But she had not seen clearly before now that he loved her mother. And she understood how unlike must be the man's love for his wife, who had lived with him a long life in evil days and good, to his love for the child who had but shared his joys and taken to herself his inmost heart's tenderness. And she wept and prayed God and St. Olav for help—for she remembered that tearful and tender farewell last autumn on the hills, but it *could* not be true that she wished now that farewell had been the last!

On the day that begins the summer half-year * Kristin bore her sixth son, and already, the fifth day after, she was up and had gone across to the hall to sit with her father. Lavrans misliked this—it had never been the use in his house for a lying-in woman to come into the open air before the day she went to be churched. At least, he said, she must never cross the court-yard except when the sun was in the heavens. Ragnfrid was listening when he spoke of this.

"I was thinking but now, husband," she said, "that from us, your womenkind, you have never had great obedience, but we have most often done as we ourselves would."

"Knew you not that before?" asked her husband, laughing. "'Tis not your brother Trond's fault, then—mind you not that he would rail at me always for an old woman because I let you women have the upper hand?"

Sira Eirik came over daily to the dying man. The old parish priest's sight was nearly gone, but the story of the creation in the Norse tongue, and the evangels and psalter in Latin, he read as plainly and flowingly as ever, for he knew the books so well. But Lavrans had gotten a great book some years before down at Saastad, and he was most fain to be read to from it—but Sira Eirik could not manage to read in it, by reason of his bad eyes. So her father prayed Kristin to try if she could read it. And when she was grown a little used to the book, she found, sure enough, that she could read from it fairly and

* "Summer-day" = 14th April.

well, and it was a great joy to her that now there was somewhat that she could do for her father.

In this book were such things as debates between Fear and Courage, between Faith and Doubt, Body and Soul. There were likewise some sagas of holy men, and more than one account of men who, while yet alive, had been rapt away in the spirit and had seen the pains of the place of torment, the tribulations of purgatory fire, and the bliss of the heavenly kingdom. Lavrans spoke much now of purgatory fire, which he looked soon to enter; but he was quite without fear. He hoped for great solacement from his friends' and the priests' intercessions, and trusted firmly that St. Olav and St. Thomas would give him strength in this his last trial, as he had so often felt that they had strengthened him in this life. He had ever heard that he that was firm in the faith would never for a single moment lose from before his eyes the bliss to which the soul was going through the scorching fires. Kristin deemed that her father thought with gladness of what was coming, as of a trial of his manhood. She remembered dimly from her childhood that time when the King's sworn men from the Dale set out for the war against Duke Eirik—it seemed to her that now her father looked forward to his death as he had looked forward then to adventures and battles.

One day she said to him she deemed he had had so many trials in this life that 'twas like he would come off lightly from those of the life to come. Lavrans answered: it seemed not so to him now; he had been a rich man; he had been born of a noble house; friends had he had and good advancement in the world. "My heaviest sorrows were that I never saw my mother's face, and that I lost my children—but soon these will be sorrows no longer. And so it is with other things that have weighed on me while I lived—they are no longer sorrows."

Her mother was often with them while Kristin read; strangers, too; and Erlend now was glad to sit and listen. All these folks had delight of the reading, but she herself was shaken and made hopeless by it—she thought on her own heart that knew so well what good and right were, and yet was ever intent on unrighteousness. And she feared for her little child—scarce dared sleep at night for fear it might die a heathen. She had two women ever to sit up and watch, and yet was she afraid to fall asleep herself. Her other children had all been baptized before they were three days old; but they had put off this one's christening, since it was a big, strong child, and they would fain name

it after Lavrans—and in the Dale here folk held stiffly to the custom that children must not be named after living men.

One day when she sat by her father and had the child in her lap, he prayed her to unwrap its swaddling-clothes; for as yet he had seen no more than the little lad's face. She did so and laid the boy on her father's arm. Lavrans stroked the little rounded breast and took one of the small tight-clenched hands in his:

"Strange it is, kinsman, that you are to bear my breastplate—now would you fill no more room in it than a worm in a hollow nut, and this hand has a great way to grow before it can grasp my sword-hilt round. When a man sees such things as this little knave, he wellnigh comes to understand that God's will with us was not that we should bear arms. But not much greater shall you be, you little one, before you long to take them up. 'Tis but the fewest men born of women that bear so great love toward God that they will forswear the bearing of arms. I had not such love."

He lay a little, looking at the babe.

"You bear your children under a loving heart, my Kristin—the boy is great and fat, but you are pale and thin as a wand, and so, your mother says, it was with them all when you were delivered of them. Ramborg's daughter was little and thin," he said laughing, "but Ramborg blooms like a rose."

"Yet seems it to me strange that she would not suckle her child herself," said Kristin.

"Simon would not have it either—he says he will not repay her for the gift by letting her wear herself away. Bear in mind, Ramborg was not full sixteen years—she had scarce worn out her own childish footgear when she had this daughter—and never had she felt an hour's sickness before—'twas no marvel that her patience was short. You were a grown woman when you were wedded, my Kristin."

Of a sudden Kristin fell into a wild weeping—she scarce knew herself what she wept for so. But it was so true—she had loved her children from the first hour that she knew she bore them in her womb; she had loved them while they plagued her with unrest, weighed her down and made her uncomely. She had loved their little faces from the first moment she saw them, and had loved them every hour as they grew and changed. But none had rightly loved them with her, and joyed with her in them—'twas not Erlend's way—he was fond of them enough; but Naakkve he deemed had come too early, and as each of the others came, he had ever thought him one too many. She dimly remembered what she had thought of the fruit of sin the first winter

she was at Husaby—she knew that she had been forced to taste its bitterness, though in other wise than she had feared. Something had gone awry between her and Erlend in those first days, and 'twas like it could never be made straight again.

"What is it now, Kristin?" asked her father quietly, in a while. She could not tell him all this. So she said, as soon as she could speak for weeping:

"Should not I sorrow, father, when you lie here——?"

At length, when Lavrans pressed her, she spoke of her fear for the unchristened child. On this he gave order straightway that the child should be brought to church the next holy-day—he said he believed not that this would slay him before God's good time.

"Besides, I have lain here long enough now," he said, laughing. "Sad work there is over our coming and our going, Kristin—in sickness are we born and in sickness do we die, he that dies not on a sudden. To me when I was young the best death seemed to be slain on the battle-field. But a sinful man may well have need of the sick-bed—though now I cannot feel that my soul is like to grow stronger through my lying on here——"

So the boy was christened the next Sunday, and was given his mother's father's name. Kristin and Erlend were much blamed for this in the country-side, though Lavrans Björgulfssön said to all who came to see him that 'twas done at his desire: he would not have a heathen in his house when death came to the door.

Lavrans began now to grow fearful lest his death should fall in the midst of the spring sowing, thereby putting to great hardship the many folk who would be fain to honour his funeral by following in its train. But one morning, fourteen days after the christening, Erlend came to Kristin in the old weaving-house, where she had lain since the boy's birth. It was well on in the morning, past the dinner-time; but she was still abed, for the boy had been restless. Erlend was much moved; he said to her, quietly and lovingly, that she must get up now and come to her father. Lavrans had had some fearful heart-spasms at daybreak, and since had lain long swooning. Sira Eirik was with him now and had just heard his confession.

It was the fifth day after Halvard's Mass. Rain was falling gently and steadily. When Kristin came out into the court-yard, there came to her on the soft breath of air from the south the smell of fields new-ploughed and dressed. The country-side lay brown under the spring rain, the air was blue between the high mountains, and the mists drifted along half-way up the hill-sides. A tinkling of little

bells came from the thickets along the brimming grey river—the flocks of goats had been let loose, and were nibbling at the blossoming twigs. 'Twas the weather that had ever rejoiced her father's heart, the end of winter and cold for folk and for cattle, the beasts all set free from narrow dark byres and scanty forage.

She saw at once in her father's face that now death was very near. About his nostrils the skin was snow-white, his lips and the circles round his great eyes were bluish, the hair had fallen apart, and lay in damp strands over the broad dewy forehead. But he was in his full senses now, and spoke clearly, though slowly and in a weak voice.

The house-folk went forward to his bed, one by one, and Lavrans took each of them by the hand, thanked them for their service, bade them farewell, and prayed them to forgive him if he had ever wronged them in any wise; he prayed them, too, to think of him with a prayer for his soul. Then he said farewell to his kindred. He bade his daughters bend down so that he might kiss them, and he called down the blessing of God and of all the saints upon them. Both wept bitterly, and young Ramborg threw herself into her sister's arms; then, with arms twined round each other, Lavrans' two daughters went to their place at their father's bed-foot, the younger one still weeping on Kristin's breast.

Erlend's face quivered, and tears ran down over his cheeks when he lifted Lavrans' hand and kissed it, while he prayed his wife's father in a low voice to forgive him all his sins against him at all times. Lavrans said he did so with all his heart, and he prayed that God might be with him all his days. There was a strange pale light over Erlend's comely face when he came softly round and stood at his wife's side, hand in hand with her.

Simon Darre wept not, but he knelt down when he took his father-in-law's hand to kiss, and he stayed kneeling a little while holding it fast. "Warm and good is your hand, son-in-law," said Lavrans with a faint smile. Ramborg turned her to her husband when he came to her side, and Simon threw his arm about her slender girlish shoulders.

Last of all, Lavrans bade farewell to his wife. They whispered some words to each other that none could hear, and exchanged a kiss in the sight of all, as was fitting and seemly, since death was in the room. After this, Ragnfrid kneeled down in front of her husband's couch, with her face turned towards his; she was white and calm and still.

Sira Eirik tarried on after he had anointed the dying man with the sacred oil and given him the viaticum. He sat by the bed-head, saying

over prayers; Ragnfrid was sitting now on the bed's edge. Some hours went by. Lavrans lay with half-shut eyes. Now and again he moved his head restlessly on the pillow, groped a little with his hands on the coverlid, and breathed heavily and moaningly once or twice. They deemed that he had lost power of speech, but there were no death-throes.

It grew dusk early, and the priest lit a candle. The folk sat still, looking at the dying man and listening to the dripping and trickling of the rain without the house. Then an unrest seemed to come upon the sick man, his body shook, a blue shade came upon his face, and he seemed to struggle for breath. Sira Eirik passed his arm behind his shoulders and lifted him up to a sitting posture, while he stayed his head on his own breast and held the cross up before his face.

Lavrans opened his eyes, fixed them on the crucifix in the priest's hand, and spoke softly, but so clearly that most in the room heard the words:

"*Exsurrexi, et adhuc sum tecum.*" *

Once more some tremors passed over the body, and his hands groped on the coverlid. Sira Eirik went on holding him close for a little while. Then he warely laid his friend's body back on the pillows, kissed the forehead and smoothed the hair about it, before he pressed the eyelids and nostrils shut, then rose to his feet and began to pray.

Kristin was given leave to take her turn in watching the body at night. They had laid out Lavrans on straw in the upper hall; for there was most room there, and they looked to have a great gathering of folk for the wake.

Her father seemed to her unspeakably beautiful as he lay there in the tapers' light with his pale-golden visage bared. They had turned down the napkin from his face so that it might not be soiled by the hands of the many folk that came to see the corpse. Sira Eirik and the parish priest from Kvam chanted over him—the Kvam priest had come up in the evening to bid Lavrans a last farewell, but had been too late.

But already next day the guests began to come riding to the manor, and now it behoved Kristin, for seemliness' sake, to betake her to bed again, since she had not yet been to church. Now it was her turn to have her bed decked out with silken coverings and the finest cushions the house could furnish. The Gjesling cradle was brought back from

* Psalm 139, v. 18.

Formo on loan; Lavrans the younger was laid in it, and every day people came in and out to see her and the child.

Her father's body kept fresh and sweet, she heard—it was but grown somewhat more yellow. And none had seen before so many candles brought to set about a dead man's bier.

On the fifth day began the grave-ale—and 'twas stately beyond measure in every wise—there were more than a hundred strange horses on the manor and at Laugarbru, and, besides, some guests had to lie at Formo. On the seventh day the heirs divided the lands and goods in all friendliness and concord—Lavrans had taken order for all things himself before he died, and all followed his wishes faithfully.

The next day the body, which lay now in the Olav's church, was to be brought forth to begin the journey to Hamar.

The evening before—rather 'twas far on in the night—Ragnfrid came into the hearth-room house, where her daughter lay with her child. The mistress of the house was exceeding weary, but her face was clear and calm. She bade the serving-women go out:

"Every house on the place is full, but I trow you will find a corner somewhere; I have a mind to watch over my daughter myself, on this my last night in my home."

She took the child from Kristin's arms, bore it across to the hearth, and made it ready for the night.

"Strange must it be for you, mother, to flit away from this place where you have lived with my father all these years," said Kristin. "I scarce understand how you can bear it."

"Much less could I bear it, methinks," said Ragnfrid, rocking little Lavrans in her lap, "to live here and not see your father going about among the houses.

"You have never heard how it came about that we flitted hither to the Dale and made our home here," she began again in a while. "The time word came that they looked my father, Ivar, should soon breathe his last, I was unfit to take the road; Lavrans had to journey north alone. I mind well 'twas such fair weather the evening he set forth—already in those days he had come to like riding late, in the cool; so he was to ride to Oslo that night; 'twas just before midsummer. I went with him up to where the road from the manor cuts the church road —mind you? there are some great bare rocks there and barren soil round about—the worst lands on all Skog, they ever feel the drought first—but that year the corn grew well and fairly on those fields, and

we spoke of it. Lavrans walked, leading his horse; and I had you by the hand—you were four winters old——

"When we came to where the roads joined, I told you to run home to the houses. You were loath to go, but then your father said that you should see if you could find five white stones and set them in a cross in the beck below the spring—'twas to guard him from the trolls of the Mjörsa Wood when he sailed by there. Then you set off running——"

"Is that a thing that folks there tell?" asked Kristin.

"I have never heard it, either before or since. Your father must have made it up, methinks, there and then. Mind you not, he made up so many tales when he played with you?"

"Yes, I remember."

"I went with him through the wood, all the way to the dwarf-stone. Then he bade me turn back, and he, too, went back with me to the cross-roads again—he laughed and said I might have known he would not let me walk alone through the wood, and when the sun was gone down, too. As we stood there at the cross-roads, I put my arms round his neck; I was so cast down because I could not come back home—I never could thrive rightly at Skog, and I longed ever to be back north in the Dale. Lavrans comforted me, and at last he said: 'When I come back, if I find you with my son in your arms, then you may ask me for what you will, and if 'tis in the power of man to give it, you shall not have asked in vain.' I answered: then would I pray that we might flit up hither and dwell on the lands of my heritage. Your father liked this but little, and he said: 'Could you not have found a greater thing to pray for?'—he laughed a little, and I thought: he will never do this—and it seemed to me, too, but reason that he should not. Afterward you know how things went with me—Sigurd, your youngest brother, lived not an hour—Halvdan christened him and he died straightway after. . . .

"Your father came home one morning early—he had heard at Oslo, the night before, how things stood at home, and had ridden straight on without tarrying. I was still in bed; I was so sorrowful I had not the heart to rise—it seemed to me I would liefest never have risen again. God forgive me, when they brought you in to me, I turned my face to the wall, and would not look on you, my little child. But then said Lavrans, as he sat on my bed side, with his cloak and sword still on him, that now must we try whether things would go better for us if we lived here at Jörundgaard—and 'twas thus we came to make

our flitting from Skog. But since it was so, you may think that I have no mind to dwell here, now Lavrans is gone."

Ragnfrid came over with the child and laid it to its mother's breast. She took the silk coverlid that had been spread over Kristin's bed in the day-time, folded it up, and laid it aside. Then she stood a while looking at her daughter, and touched the thick yellow-brown plait that lay between her white breasts:

"Your father asked me so often if your hair were as thick and fair as ever. 'Twas a great joy to him that you lost not your loveliness through bearing so many children. He rejoiced much over you in these last years, that you had grown to be so notable a woman and still stood fresh and fair with all your fair little sons about you."

Kristin gulped down her tears once or twice.

"To me, mother, he would often speak of how you had been the best of wives—he said I should tell you——" She stopped abashed, and Ragnfrid laughed softly.

"Lavrans might have known that he needed not to have any bear me word of his loving-kindness toward me." She stroked the child's head and her daughter's hand, which was round the little one. "But maybe he would have—— It is not so, my Kristin, that on any day I have envied you your father's love. 'Twas but right and reason that you have loved him more than me. You were so sweet and lovely a little maid—I was not grateful enough that God had let me keep you. But I ever thought more on what I had lost than on what I possessed."

Ragnfrid sat down on the bedside:

"They had other ways at Skog than our ways at home here. I cannot call to mind that my father ever kissed me—he kissed my mother when she was laid in the dead-straw. Mother kissed Gudrun at mass, for she stood nearest her, and then sister kissed me—but else we never used to kiss. . . .

"At Skog there was a custom that when we came from church after having taken the sacrament, and we alighted from our horses in the court-yard, Sir Björgulf kissed his sons and me on the cheek, and we kissed his hand. Afterward all married pairs kissed each other, and then we shook hands with all the serving-folk that had been at the service, and wished each other all good of the sacred food. And it was much their use, Lavrans' and Aasmund's, to kiss their father's hand when he made them gifts and at suchlike times. When he or Inga came in, the sons rose always to their feet and stood till they

were bidden to sit down. At first these all seemed to me foolish, outlandish ways. . . .

"Afterward, in the years I lived with your father, when we lost our sons, and through all those years when we suffered such great fear and sorrow for our Ulvhild—it was well for me then that Lavrans had been nurtured so—to follow gentler and more loving ways."

In a while Kristin said, low:

"Father never saw Sigurd, then?"

"No," said Ragnfrid in the same low tones. "I saw him not either while he lived."

Kristin lay silent awhile; then she said:

"None the less, mother, so it seems to me, you have yet had much good in your life——"

Tears began to drip down over Ragnfrid Ivarsdatter's white face:

"Aye, God help me. To me, too, it seems so now."

Soon after, she took the babe, which was sleeping now, from its mother's breast, and laid it in the cradle. She fastened up Kristin's shift with its little brooch, stroked her daughter's cheek, and bade her sleep now. Kristin lifted a hand.

"Mother——" she said beseechingly.

Ragnfrid bent down, drew her daughter close in her arms, and kissed her many times. She had not done this before in all the years since Ulvhild died.

Next day 'twas the fairest spring weather, as Kristin stood behind the corner of the hall-house and looked over at the hill-sides beyond the river. The smell of growth was everywhere, and the song of becks set free; there was a tinge of green on all the woods and meadows. Where the road ran along the mountain-side above Laugarbru, a patch of winter rye shone out fresh and bright—Jon had burnt the undergrowth there last year and sowed rye in the burned patch.

She would see the funeral train best when it passed by there. . . .

And there it was, moving slowly along, below the hill-side scree, and above the fresh new rye-field.

She could make out all the priests riding ahead of all; there were acolytes, too, in the first troop, bearing crosses and tapers. She could not see the flames in the bright daylight, but she saw the tapers themselves as slender white streaks. Then came two horses bearing between them her father's coffin on a litter; and then she could pick out Erlend on his black horse, her mother, Simon and Ramborg, and many of her kinsfolk and friends in the long funeral train.

For a while she could clearly hear the priests' chant above the roar of the Laagen, but then the sound of the hymn died away, lost in the noise of the river and the humming of the becks on the hill-sides. Kristin stood still, gazing, long after the last pack-horse with baggage was lost from sight in the wayside woods.

BOOK III

ERLEND NIKULAUSSÖN

1

RAGNFRID IVARSDATTER lived not full two years after her husband's death; she died early in the winter of 1332. It is far from Hamar to Skaun, so that they heard not aught of her death at Husaby till she had lain in her grave more than a month. But at Whitsuntide the next year Simon Andressön came to them; there was one thing and another to be talked over between the kinsfolk concerning Ragnfrid's inheritance. Kristin Lavransdatter owned Jörundgaard now, and it was settled that Simon should hold the charge of her lands and goods, and draw her farmers to account; he had managed his mother-in-law's estates in the Dale while she had dwelled at Hamar.

Just at this time Erlend had much trouble and vexation over certain cases that had come up in his Wardenship. The autumn before, Huntjov, the farmer of Forbregd in Updal, had slain a neighbour of his for calling his wife a troll-woman. The parish folk brought the slayer bound to the Warden, and Erlend had him shut up in a loft. But when the cold grew fierce in the winter-time, he let the man go about loose among his followers. Huntjov had been with Erlend in *Margygren* in the north, and had done manful service there. So when Erlend sent in letters touching Huntjov's case, praying that he be given grace * to abide at home till his case was judged, he set the man in the fairest light; and, as Ulf Haldorssön went surety that Huntjov would present him in due time at the Orkedal Thing, Erlend let the man go home for the Yule holy-days. But from home he and his wife set out to visit the rest-house keeper in Drivdal—he was a kinsman of theirs—and on that journey they disappeared. Erlend believed that they had lost their lives in the great storm that had raged about that time; but many folk said they had run away—the Warden's people might whistle for them now. And then new matters were brought up against the runaways—that Huntjov had killed a man some years before away in the hills and buried his body in a scree—a man that he thought had slashed his mare on the rump. And it came out clearly that the wife had dealt in witchcraft.

Next the Updal priest and the Archbishop's commissary set to work to search and sift all these rumours of witchcraft. And this led to

* Note 14.

sorry things coming out about the way folks held by their Christian faith in many parts of the Orkdöla County. 'Twas most in the outlying parishes, like Rennabu and Updalsskog; but the case of one old man from Budvik, too, was brought before the Archbishop's Court at Nidaros. And in this Erlend showed so little zeal that there was much talk of it. It was the old carl Aan, who had lived down by the lake below Husaby, and must wellnigh be reckoned as one of Erlend's house-folk. He had dealt in runes and spells, and there was talk of some images in his hut, which folk said he had used to sacrifice to. But naught of this kind was found after his death. Erlend himself and Ulf Haldorssön had been with him, 'twas known, when he died—and doubtless they had made away with both one thing and another before the priest came, people said. Aye, and when folk came to think of it, had not Erlend's own mother's sister been charged with witchcraft, whoredom and husband-murder?—though Lady Aashild Gautesdatter was too crafty and slippery, and no doubt besides had had too many mighty friends, for aught to be proved against her. And at the same time people called to mind that Erlend in his youth had lived in sadly unchristian fashion, and had set at naught the ban of the Church.

The end of all this was that the Archbishop summoned Erlend Nikulaussön to come and confer with him at Nidaros. Simon went with his brother-in-law into the city; he was to fetch his sister's son from Ranheim, for it was meant that the boy should go back with him to the Dale, and be with his mother for a while.

It was but a week from the time set for the Frostathing, and the city was full of people. When the brothers-in-law came to the Archbishop's palace and were shown into the hall of audience, a number of Crossed Friars were there, and some laymen of standing—among them, the Lagmand of the Frostathing, Harald Nikulaussön; Olav Hermanssön, Lagmand of Nidaros; Sir Guttorm Helgessön, Warden of Jemtland; and also Arne Gjavvaldssön, who at once came up to Simon Darre and greeted him heartily. Arne drew Simon apart with him into a window-nook and they sat down there.

Simon was somewhat ill at ease. He had not met the other since he had been at Ranheim ten years before, and, though the Ranheim folk had then welcomed him most fairly, his visit there on such an errand had left a sore spot in his mind.

Whilst Arne was bragging of young Gjavvald, Simon sat watching his brother-in-law. Erlend stood talking with the Treasurer,* whose name was Sir Baard Peterssön, but who was not of kin to the Hestnæs

* Note 15.

house. One could not have said that Erlend's bearing lacked due courtesy; yet he was exceeding free and unabashed as he stood there talking with the old nobleman—swaying a little back and forth, with his hands laid together behind his back. As was mostly his use, he was clad in dark colours, but most richly: violet *kothardi* sitting close to his body and slashed up the sides, black tippet, with hood thrown back to show the grey silk lining, silver-mounted belt, and long red boots that were laced tight round the calves and set off the man's slender, shapely legs and feet.

In the sharp light from the glass windows of the hall, 'twas plain enough to see that the hair at Erlend Nikulaussön's temples was not a little sprinkled with grey. Round his mouth and beneath the eyes the fine sunburned skin was scratched, as it were, with fine wrinkles, and cross-furrows had appeared in the long, fairly arched neck. Yet he seemed full young amongst the others there—though he was in no wise the youngest man in the room. 'Twas that he was slender and lithe as ever, bore his body in the same supple, somewhat careless fashion as in his youth, and walked no less lightly and springily, as now, after the Treasurer had left him, he began to stroll up and down the room, still with his hands clasped behind him. All the other men were seated; they talked a little among themselves in low, dry voices. Erlend's light step and the jingle of his small silver spurs were too clearly heard.

At length one of the younger men testily bade him sit down, "and be a little quieter, man!"

Erlend stopped short and knit his brows, then turned to the man who had spoken.

"Where were you drinking yestereven, kinsman Jon, that your head is so sore to-day?" he said with a laugh, sitting down. When Harald Lagmand came across to him, he rose, indeed, and stood till the other had sat down, but then he dropped down by the Lagmand's side, crossed one leg over the other, and sat with his hands clasped over his knee, while Harald was speaking.

Erlend had told Simon frankly of all the trouble he had fallen into by reason of the manslayer and the witch-woman having slipped through his fingers. But no man could have seemed more care-free than Erlend, as he sat talking the matter over with the Lagmand.

Now the Archbishop entered. He was led to his high seat by two men, who propped him up with pillows. Simon had never before seen Lord Eiliv Kortin. He looked old and feeble, and seemed to be cold, though he was clad in a fur cloak and wore a fur-lined cap.

When their turn came, Erlend led his brother-in-law up to him, and Simon knelt on one knee while he kissed Lord Eiliv's ring. Erlend, too, kissed the ring reverently.

He bore him most seemly and reverently, too, when at last he stood forth before the Archbishop, after the churchman had spoken a good while with the others on divers matters. But he answered somewhat lightly the questions one of the Canons put to him, and his mien was that of a man confident in his innocence.

Yes, he had heard the common talk of witchcraft for many years. But, so long as no one had come to him for guidance, surely he could in no wise be bound to search out the truth of all the talk that went on among the womenfolk in a parish. Surely 'twas the priest's affair to make inquiry, if there were grounds for making out a case against any.

Then he was asked of the old man who had dwelt at Husaby, and who folks said was a wizard.

Erlend smiled a little; yes, Aan had bragged of it himself, but no proof of his mystery had Erlend ever seen. From his childhood up he had heard Aan talk of some women he called Hærn and Skögul and Snotra, but he had never taken all this to be aught else but toys and nursery-tales. "My brother Gunnulf and our priest, Sira Eiliv, cross-questioned him once or twice, I know, but I trow they cannot have found aught against him, since they did nothing. The man came to the church each mass-day, and knew his Christian prayers." Great faith in Aan's sorceries he had never had, and since he had seen somewhat in the north of Lapp magic and spells, he had seen full well that the magic Aan dealt in was but foolery.

Then the priest asked if 'twas true that Erlend himself had once been given a thing by Aan—something that was to bring him fortune in *amor?*

Aye, answered Erlend quickly and clearly, with a smile. 'Twas when he was about fifteen, he thought—eight and twenty years ago or so. A skin pouch with a little white stone in it, and some dried-up things—bits of some beast, he believed. But he had not had much faith in such things in those days either—he had given it away the next year, the first year he was at the palace. It was in a bath-house up in the town—in a rash, jesting moment he had shown the charm to some other young lads—and afterwards one of the gentlemen of the guard had come to him wanting to buy it. Erlend had given it him in barter for a razor of fine steel.

It was asked who this gentleman might be.

At first Erlend would not come out with it. But the Archbishop

himself bade him speak. Then Erlend looked up with a gleam of mischief in his blue eyes. "'Twas Sir Ivar Ogmundssön."

There came a somewhat strained look into the men's faces. Strange snorting sounds came from old Sir Guttorm Helgessön. Lord Eiliv himself had some ado not to smile. Then Erlend, growing venturesome, went on, with eyes cast down and biting his under lip a little:

"My Lord, I trust you will not trouble the good knight with this ancient matter. As I have said to you, I believed not much in the thing myself, and I have never marked that it made any odds to either of us, my giving him this treasure——"

Sir Guttorm doubled up in a roar, and the other men had to give in, one after the other, and laugh aloud. The Archbishop tittered a little, coughing and shaking his head. It was well known that Sir Ivar's will had ever been better than his fortune in certain matters.

In a while, however, one of the Crossed Friars grew sober again and reminded the company they were come together to speak of grave matters. Erlend asked a little sharply if a charge had been laid against him from any quarter, and if he were on his trial—he had not supposed aught else than that he had been sent for to a friendly conference. The talk then went on as before, but some disorder was caused by Guttorm Helgessön bursting out every now and then into little snickers of laughter.

The day after, when the brothers-in-law rode home from Ranheim, Simon brought up the matter of this meeting. It seemed to Simon that Erlend took the thing over-lightly—he thought he had marked clearly that more than one of the great folk there would be fain to do him an ill turn if they could.

Erlend said he knew well enough they would, if they had the power. For here in the north most men leaned to the Chancellor's party—not the Archbishop, though: in him Erlend had a trusty friend. But Erlend's dealings in all things were comformable to the law—he took counsel in all cases with his clerk, Klöng Aressön, who was most skilful in such matters. Erlend spoke gravely now, but he smiled slightly as he said that he deemed none had looked that he should be as well skilled in the matters of his charge as he was—neither his dear friends in this country-side nor the lords of the Council. For the rest, he was not sure that he cared to keep the Wardenship if 'twas to be on other terms than those he had while Erling Vidkunssön was at the helm. His affairs were now in such a posture—the more so since his wife's parents' death—that he had no need to bargain for the favour of the men that had come to power when the King was declared of age.

Aye, that rotten boy they might just as well call of age now as later; 'twas unlike he would grow more of a man by keeping. One would come to know all the sooner what he was planning—he or the Swedish lords that pulled the strings. Folk would soon own that Erling had been clear-sighted after all. It would cost us dear if King Magnus tried to bring Skaane under the Swedish crown, and 'twould mean war with the Danes the moment *one* man, be he Danish or German, came to power in Denmark. And the peace in the north that was to last ten years—half the time was gone by now, and 'twas unsure whether the Russians would hold to the pact even for the five years left. Erlend had little faith in them, nor had Erling either, for that matter. Aye, Chancellor Paal was doubtless a learned man, long-headed too, in many ways, perhaps. But these gentry of the Council who had taken him for their leader—Soten here had more wit than the whole of them put together. Well, now they had got quit of Erling—for the time. And for the time, Erlend, too, had just as lief step aside. But Erling and his friends would doubtless rather that Erlend kept a hold on his powers and fortunes in the north here—so he had not made up his mind.

"Methinks you have learned now to sing Sir Erling's tune," Simon Darre could not help saying.

Erlend answered: aye, it was so. He had dwelt in Sir Erling's house last summer, when he was at Björgvin, and he had learned to understand the man better now. So it was that Sir Erling wished above all things to uphold the King's peace in the land. But he wished, too, that Norway's realm should have the lion's peace—that none should have leave to break a tooth or clip a claw of their kinsman King Haakon's lion—and that it should not be turned, either, into a trained hunting-dog for the people of another land. For the rest, Erling had it much at heart now to bring to an end the old quarrels between Norsemen and Lady Ingebjörg. Now that she had been left a widow by Sir Knut, one could not but wish that she should get some power over her son again. True it was that she bore such exceeding great love to the children she had borne to Knut Porse that it seemed she had in some measure forgotten her eldest son, but doubtless all this would be changed when she came to meet with him again.

Simon deemed, that all this sounded as though Erlend were well-informed of what was afoot. But he wondered at Erling Vidkunssön—did the fallen High Steward believe that Erlend Nikulaussön had the writ to form a judgment in such things, or was it that Erling was catching now at any straw within reach? Like enough, the

Knight of Giske was loath to loose his grasp on power. None could ever have said of him that he used it for his own profit, but then, with his riches and his standing, he had no need to do so. And all said that as the years of his Stewardship went on he had grown more and more self-willed and wise in his own conceit, and as the other lords of the Council began more and more to withstand him, he had at last grown so masterful that he would scarce deign to listen to a word from any man.

It was like Erlend that he had now, so to speak, gotten aboard Erling Vidkunssön's ship with both feet—just as it had met with head winds and it seemed most unsure whether his throwing himself with all his heart on his rich kinsman's side would profit either Sir Erling or Erlend himself. Yet Simon could not but confess to himself that, rashly as Erlend talked both of people and of affairs, there seemed to be a kernel of good sense in what he said.

But that night he was in a wild and reckless mood. He was dwelling now in Sir Nikulaus' mansion, which his brother had given to Erlend when he took the cowl. Kristin was with him, with three of their children, the two eldest and the youngest, and his daughter Margret.

Late in the evening many folk looked in on them, amongst them some of the men who had been at the meeting at the Archbishop's the morning before. As they sat drinking at the board after supper, Erlend overflowed with noise and laughter. He had taken an apple from a dish upon the table, and he cut scrolls and scratches on it with his knife—and then rolled it across the board into the lap of Lady Sunniva Olavsdatter, who sat over against him.

The lady who sat by Sunniva's side wanted to see the apple, and snatched at it; the other would not give it up, and the two women pushed and struggled with each other, with laughter and little shrieks. But Erlend shouted out that Lady Eyvor should have an apple all to herself. Before long he had thrown apples to all the women in the company, and there were love-runes carved on them all, he said.

"You'll be ruined, lad, should you redeem all these pledges!" cried out a man.

"Then will I let them go unredeemed—'tis not the first time I have had to," Erlend answered back; and again there was much laughter.

But Klöng, the Icelander, had looked at one of the apples and he cried out that these were not runes, but only meaningless scrolls. He would show them, he said, how runes should rightly be cut. But Erlend cried out he must do no such thing:

"For then 'tis like they would bid me lay you by the heels, Klöng —and I cannot get on without you."

In the midst of all this turmoil, Erlend and Kristin's youngest son had come toddling into the hall. Lavrans Erlendssön was a little over two years old now, and was as comely a child as one could see, fair and fat, with silky-fine yellow curly hair. And so all the women on the outer bench were at once set on getting hold of the child—they passed him from lap to lap, and caressed him, not too gently, for they were now all heated and in wild mirth. Kristin, who sat with her husband in the high-seat against the wall, begged to have the child brought round to her, and the little one whimpered and tried to come at her, but 'twas of no avail.

Of a sudden, Erlend leapt across the table and took the child, which was shrieking now, because Lady Sunniva and Lady Eyvor were dragging at him and struggling over him. The father took the boy up in his arms, coaxing him, and as the little one still went on crying, he began hushing and lulling him, walking up and down with him out in the hall in the half-darkness. It seemed now as though Erlend had quite forgotten his guests. The child's little bright head lay on its father's shoulder under the man's black hair, and now and then Erlend would caress, with lips half opened, the little hand that rested on his breast in front. So he walked up and down till the maid came in that should have looked to the child and put him to bed long before.

Some of the guests called out now that Erlend should sing for them to dance to—he had such a fine strong voice. At first he was unwilling, but then he went over to where his young daughter sat on the women's bench. He put his arm around Margret and drew her out on to the floor.

"You must come along, then, my Margret, and dance with your father."

A young man came forward and took the maid's hand—"Margret has promised to dance with me to-night"—but Erlend lifted his daughter in his arms and set her down on his other side:

"Dance you with your wife, Haakon—never did I dance with others when I was as newly wed as you are."

"Ingebjörg says she cannot dance to-night—and I have promised Haakon to dance with him, father," said Margret.

Simon Darre had no mind to dance. He stood awhile with an old lady, looking on—now and then his glance rested a moment on Kristin. While her serving-maids were clearing the board and wiping it dry and bearing in more drink and dishes of walnuts, she stood up at

the end of the table. After, she sat down by the fire-place and talked with a priest who was among the guests. In a while Simon sat down beside the two.

When they had danced one or two dances, Erlend came over to his wife.

"Come and dance with us, Kristin," he said beseechingly, holding out his hand.

"I am tired," she said, looking up for an instant.

"Do you ask her, Simon—she cannot deny you a dance."

Simon half rose from his seat and reached out his hand, but Kristin shook her head: "Ask me not, Simon—I am so weary——"

Erlend stood there a little; he looked as though he were sorely vexed at this. Then he went back to Lady Sunniva and took her hand in the chain of dancers, while he called out that now Margret should sing for them.

"Who is he that is dancing next your stepdaughter?" asked Simon. He thought in his mind that he liked the man's looks but little—though he was a fine manful-looking young fellow with a fresh brown skin, good teeth and shining eyes—but the eyes were set close in to the bridge of the nose, and, though he had a big strong mouth and chin, his forehead and upper head were narrow. Kristin said 'twas Haakon Eindridessön of Gimsar, grandson of Tore Eindridessön the Warden of Gauldöla County. Haakon had but just been wedded to the comely little woman that sat there in Olav Lagmand's lap—Olav was her godfather. Simon had marked this woman, for she somewhat favoured his first wife, though she was not so fair. As he found out now that there was a distant kinship, too, he went over and greeted Ingebjörg and sat down and talked with her.

The ring of dancers broke up in a while. The elders betook them to the drinking-board; but the young folks went on singing and disporting themselves out in the hall. Erlend came over to the fire-place along with some of the older men, but he still held Lady Sunniva's hand and led her with him, as if without thinking. The men sat down near the fire; there was no seat for the lady, but she stood before Erlend, eating walnuts, which he cracked for her with his fingers.

"An uncourteous man you are, Erlend, for sure," she said, suddenly. "There you sit, and I have to stand in front of you."

"Nay, do you sit, too," said Erlend, laughing, and pulled her down into his lap. She struggled, laughing, and called out to the mistress of the house, asking if she saw how her husband was behaving to her.

" 'Tis but the kindness of Erlend's heart," answered Kristin, laughing.

"Never does my cat rub herself against his legs but he must needs take her up and lay her in his lap."

Erlend and the lady sat on as before, making no sign, but both had grown very red. He held one arm loosely about her, as if he hardly marked that she sat there, whilst he and the other men talked of the feud between Erling Vidkunssön and Chancellor Paal, which was so much in folks' thoughts just then.

"What are you thinking on now, Kristin?" Simon asked in a while —she was sitting quite still and straight, with her hands folded in her lap. She answered:

"I was thinking now of Margret."

Later in the night, when Erlend and Simon had an errand out in the court-yard, they frighted away from each other a couple that was standing behind the house-corner. The night was clear as day, and Simon knew them for Haakon of Gimsar and Margret Erlendsdatter. Erlend looked after them—he was sober enough—and Simon saw that he misliked this; but he said, as though in excuse, that those two had known each other from childhood and were for ever teasing and jesting with each other. Simon thought that even if there were no other harm, 'twas pity of the young wife, Ingebjörg.

But the day after, when young Haakon came to the house on some errand and asked after Margit, Erlend flamed out at him:

"My daughter is not *Margit* to you. And if so be you left your talk unfinished yesterday, you had best keep awhile what you have to say to her——"

Haakon shrugged his shoulders and, when he left, begged them to greet *Margareta* from him.

The Husaby folk stayed in Nidaros till the Thing was over, but Simon felt none too happy or at home among them. Erlend was apt to fall into fretful moods when in his town-house, because Gunnulf had given the hospital, which lay on the other side of the orchard, the right to use some of the houses that opened from the orchard, and also some rights in the garden. Erlend had set his mind on buying out these rights; he liked not to see the sick folk in the garden and in the court-yard—many of them, indeed, were an ill-favoured sight—and he was fearful lest his children might take some sickness. But he could not come to agreement with the monks who managed the hospital.

Then there was Margret Erlendsdatter. Simon understood that there was much talk about her, and that Kristin was disquieted by it; but the girl's father seemed not to care—it seemed that he felt sure he

could guard his own maid and that there was naught to dread. Yet he named one day to Simon that he thought Klöng Aressön had a mind to wed his daughter, and he knew not rightly what to do in the matter. He had naught else against the Icelander than that he was the son of a priest—he was loath it should be said of Margret's children that there was a stain on both their parents' birth. Else was Klöng a man that all liked, cheerful, keen-witted and most learned. His father, Sira Are, had brought him up and taught him himself; he had meant his son to be a priest, and 'twas said he had even taken steps to get a dispensation for him, but Klöng had drawn back and would not take the frock. It seemed as though Erlend was minded to let the matter rest awhile—if no better match offered, he could always give the maid to Klöng Aressön.

Yet was it known that Erlend had already had such a good offer for his daughter that folk had had much to say of his pride and folly in letting the bargain slip. It was from a grandson of Baron Sigvat of Leirhole—Sigmund Finssön was the man's name; he was not rich, for Finn Sigvatssön had had eleven children who all lived; and he could not be called young—he was about Erlend's age—but he was a man in good esteem and of a good understanding. And with the lands that Erlend had given his daughter when he wedded Kristin Lavransdatter, and with all the jewellery and costly gifts he had given the child from time to time, and with the dowry he had agreed with Sigmund to give with her, Margret would have been more than well-to-do. Erlend, indeed, had been glad enough to find such a suitor for his base-born daughter. But when he came home to his daughter with the bridegroom, the maid took a whimsy that she would not have him because Sigmund had some warts on the edge of one of his eyelids, and she said this gave her such a loathing of him. Erlend gave in to the girl; and when Sigmund grew angry and talked of breach of troth, Erlend, too, grew hot, and said that the other must surely understand that all betrothal-pacts were made on condition that the maid was willing—his daughter should not be forced into her bride-bed. Kristin thought with her husband in so far as that he should not force the girl, but 'twas known that she had deemed Erlend should have spoken in sober sadness to his daughter and made her understand that Sigmund Finssön was so good a match as, seeing how things stood with her birth, she could not hope to find a better. But Erlend had been wroth with his wife for venturing to speak thus, though she said it to him only. These things Simon had heard at Ranheim. The folk there foretold that all this must needs end badly; 'twas true Erlend was a man of

weight now, and the maid was a passing fair maid, but yet 'twas impossible it could be for her good that her father had spoiled her all these years and fed the flames of her pride and self-will.

After the Frosta Thing, Erlend went home to Husaby with his wife and children, and with them went Simon Darre.

Now, when the eldest sons were big enough to ride abroad with Erlend, he had begun to take more heed of the boys. Simon marked that Kristin was not wholly glad of this—she deemed that 'twas not only good they got by going amongst their father's men. And it was about the children that unfriendly words most often passed between this wedded pair—even if they did not quarrel outright, they often came more nigh to it than Simon deemed fitting. And it seemed to him that Kristin was the most at fault. Erlend was quick-tempered and hasty, but she often spoke as though from a deep-hidden grudge. So it was one day when she made some complaint about Naakkve. Erlend answered that he would speak strictly to the boy, but, on his wife's saying something more, he broke out testily, saying he could not well thrash a big boy like him, because of the house-folk.

"No, 'tis too late now; had you done it while he was younger, he might have hearkened to you now. But in those days you never so much as looked his way."

"Oh, but I did. Though it was but reason surely that I should let him go about with you when he was little—and 'tis no work for a man, I trow, to beat little breechless brats."

"You thought not so last week," said Kristin, scornfully and bitterly.

Erlend made no answer, but rose to his feet and went out. And to Simon this seemed an ill speech of Erlend's wife. She was recalling a thing that had befallen the week before; as Erlend and Simon came riding into the court-yard, little Lavrans had come running toward them with a wooden sword, and as he ran by his father's horse, he struck it, in mischievous play, on the leg with his sword. The horse reared—and next moment the boy had fallen to the ground beneath its feet. Erlend jerked back and flung the horse to one side, then leapt down, throwing the rein to Simon; his face was white with fear when he lifted the boy up in his arms. But when he saw that the child was quite unhurt, he laid him over his left arm, took the wooden sword, and thrashed him with it on the bare bottom—the boy had not been breeched yet. In his flurry he knew not how hard he struck, and Lavrans was still going about black and blue. But since then Erlend had tried all the time to make friends again with the boy—while the

little man sulked, held to his mother's skirts, and threatened and slapped at his father. And when Lavrans had been put to rest in the evening in his parents' bed, where he slept (for he was still nursed by his mother at night), Erlend sat over on the bedside the whole evening, looking down on the sleeping child and touching him. He said himself, to Simon, that this boy was the one of his sons that he loved best.

When Erlend set forth for the summer meetings in his charge, Simon took the road for home. He galloped south through Gauldal, so that the sparks flew from the stones under his horse's hoofs. Once, when they rode a little slower up a steep hill, his men asked, laughing, whether they were to ride three days' march in two. Simon laughed back, and said he had more than a mind they should—"for now am I fain to be back at Formo."

He ever longed to be back when he had been away from his manor awhile—he was a home-loving man, and rejoiced always when he turned his horse into the homeward road. But it seemed to him that so much as this time he had never before yearned to get back to the Dale, and his manor, and his little daughters—aye, and now he longed for Ramborg, too. It seemed to him that he had no good reason for this great eagerness, but the life at Husaby had so weighed upon his mood that he deemed he knew now from himself how the cattle feel when a storm is gathering.

2

ALL the summer through, Kristin thought of little else than what Simon had told her of her mother's death.

Ragnfrid Ivarsdatter had died all alone—none had been near when she drew her last breath, saving a serving-woman, who slept. 'Twas not much comfort, what Simon said—that, though death came so suddenly, she was yet well prepared. It seemed like a special providence of God that, a few days before, she had felt in her such a hunger for her Redeemer's Body that she had confessed and taken the sacrament from the priest in the cloister who was her director. 'Twas certain she had made a good death—Simon had seen her body, and said it had seemed to him a marvellous sight. In death she had been so fair; she was, one knew, a woman nigh three score years of age, and for many years her face had been much wrinkled and furrowed; but this was changed altogether: her face was grown young and smooth, so that she looked like naught else but a young woman fallen asleep. Now had she been laid to rest by her husband's side; thither, too, had they brought Ulvhild Lavransdatter's bones a short time after her father's death. Over the graves was laid a great stone slab, divided in two by a fairly carven cross, and on a winding scroll was written a long Latin verse that the Prior of the cloister had made; but Simon could not remember it rightly, for he knew but little of that tongue.

Ragnfrid had had a house to herself in the yard up in the town where the commoners of the cloister lived—a single room and above it a fair loft-room. There she dwelt alone with a poor peasant woman who had been taken in by the friars for small payment, in return for her helping one or other of the richer women-commoners. But for the last half-year at least it had rather been Ragnfrid who helped the other, for the widow—Torgunna was her name—had been ailing, and Ragnfrid tended her with great kindness and care.

The last evening of her life she had been at evensong in the cloister-church, and went afterwards into the kitchen of the commoners' yard. There she cooked a good bowl of soup with strengthening herbs in it, and said to the other women who were there that she would give this to Torgunna, and she hoped the woman would be well enough in the morning to come with her to matins. This was the last time any saw

the Jörundgaard widow alive. They came not to matins—neither she nor the peasant woman—nor yet to prime. When some of the monks in the choir marked that Ragnfrid was not in the church for the day-mass either, they began to wonder—she had never before missed three services in a day. They sent word up to the town to ask if Lavrans Björgulfssön's widow were sick. When the folk came into the loft, they found the bowl of soup standing untouched on the board; in the bed Torgunna was sleeping sweetly by the wall, but Ragnfrid Ivarsdatter lay on the outside of the bed with her hands crossed on her breast, dead, and wellnigh cold already. Simon and Ramborg had come down to her burial, and it was a most fair one.

Now that the household at Husaby was grown so great and Kristin had six sons, she could no longer take a hand herself in all parts of the housekeeping. She was obliged to have a housekeeper under her, and so it came about that most of the time the mistress of the house sat in the hall sewing; there was ever someone wanting clothes—Erlend, Margret or the boys.

The last she had seen of her mother was riding after her husband's bier—that bright spring day when she had stood in the meadow at Jörundgaard and seen her father's funeral train pass the green patch of winter rye beneath the scree.

Kristin's needle flew and flew, and she thought on her parents and their home at Jörundgaard. Now, when all was memory, she seemed to herself to grow ware of much that she had not seen when she lived in the midst of it, and took as things of course her father's tender guardianship and her silent, sad-faced mother's quiet, constant work and care. She thought on her own children—they were dearer to her than her own heart's blood; they were not out of her mind one hour of her waking life. Yet was there much in her mind that she pondered over more—she loved her children without brooding on the matter. She had never thought aught else, when she was at home, but that her parents' whole life and all their doings and strivings were for herself and her sisters. Now she seemed to see that betwixt those two, who in their youth had been brought together by their fathers, wellnigh unasked, there had run strong swift currents both of sorrow and of joy—yet *she* knew naught of it save that they had passed now, hand in hand, out of her life. Now she understood that this man's and woman's lives had held much beside their love for their children—and yet that love had been strong and wide and unfathomably deep, while the love she gave them back had been weak and thoughtless and self-seeking, even when, in her childhood, those two had been her

whole world. She seemed to see herself standing far, far away—so small, so small beyond that great stretch of time and distance; she stood in the beam of sunlight that streamed down through the smoke-vent in the old hearth-room house at home, the winter-house of her childhood. Her parents stood a little back, in the shadow—they bulked as great as they had seemed to her sight when she was small, and they smiled to her—the smile that she knew now comes to one's face when a little child comes and thrusts aside heavy and troublous thoughts.

"I thought, Kristin, when you had borne a child yourself, you would surely understand better."

She remembered when her mother had said these words. Sorrowfully she thought—it was not true, she feared, even now, that she understood her mother. But she began to understand how much there was she did not understand.

This autumn Archbishop Eiliv died. And about the same time King Magnus changed the terms of service of many of the Wardens, but not Erlend Nikulaussön's. When Erlend was in Björgvin the last summer of the King's nonage, he had been given letters granting him the fourth part of all grace-payments,* fines and forfeitures in his Wardenship—the thing had made much talk, that he should have been given such a grant toward the close of a Regency. Since Erlend now owned much land in the country, and most often lived on his own farms when he moved round his Wardenship, and as he let his farmers redeem their land-dues, his incomings were large. True, this meant that the incomings from land-dues in kind were small; and he kept a great and costly train—besides his own manor-folk he had never fewer than twelve men-at-arms with him at Husaby; these were bravely mounted and exceeding well armed; and when he moved about his charge, his men lived like lords.

There was some talk of this one day when Lagmand Harald and Tore the old Warden of Gauldöla County were at Husaby. Erlend made answer that many of these men had been with him when he kept the marches in the north; "and there we shared alike in such cheer as was to be had—dried fish and sour small beer. Now the men I give food and clothes to know that I grudge them not white bread and strong ale; and if now and then, in a rage, I bid them to go to hell, they understand well enough that I mean not they should set forth before I lead the way myself."

Ulf Haldorssön, who was the headman of Erlend's guard now, said

* Note 14.

afterwards to his mistress that 'twas even so. Erlend's men loved him, and he had them wholly in his hand.

"You know yourself, Kristin, none should take much account of what Erlend says; 'tis what he does one must judge him by."

Another matter that made much talk was that, besides his housecarls, Erlend had men all about the country-side—and not in Orkdöla County only—that he had sworn to his service on his sword-hilt. Some time back he had received royal letters about this matter, but he had answered that these men had made up his ship's crew, and that he had taken oath from them the first spring when he was to sail for the north. Upon this it was enjoined upon him that he should loose these men from their oath at the next Thing he held to publish the judgments and decrees of the Lagthing, and that, to that end, he should summon thither the men from outside the county, bearing himself the costs of their journeys. And in truth he had sent for some of his old sailors from Möre to the Orkedal Thing; but no one heard aught of his having loosed them, or any other man who had ever been his follower, from their oaths. Howbeit the matter was not again opened; and so, as the autumn passed, the talk about it died down.

Late in the autumn Erlend journeyed south, and stayed over Yuletide at King Magnus' Court, which was at Oslo that year. He was vexed that he could not bring his wife to go with him; but Kristin shrank from the toilsome winter journey, and stayed on at home at Husaby.

Erlend came back three weeks after Yule, bringing fair gifts to his wife and all the children. Kristin had given her a silver bell to ring for her maids; but to Margret he gave a clasp of pure gold, for she had naught of the sort before, though she had many ornaments of every kind of silver and silver gilt. But while the women were putting away these costly gifts in their jewel-chests, something in Margret's chest caught on her sleeve and hung from it. The girl covered it up swiftly with her hand, saying to her stepmother:

"'Twas my mother left me this, so Father would not that I should show it to you."

Kristin had flushed much redder than the maid. Her heart beat hard with fear, but it seemed to her that she *must* speak a word to the young girl to warn her.

In a little she said in a low, faltering voice:

"'Tis like the gold buckle that Lady Helga of Gimsar used to wear at festivals."

"Aye—many gold things are alike," answered the girl, shortly.

Kristin locked her chest and stood still with her hands resting on it, so that Margret might not see how they shook.

"My Margret," she said softly and gently—she had to stop—but she gathered all her strength and went on:

"My Margret, bitterly have I repented—never could I joy fully in any gladness, though my father forgave me with all his heart for all that I had sinned against him—you know that I sinned against my parents for your father's sake. But the longer I live and the more I come to understand, the heavier it grows for me to remember that I repaid their goodness toward me by bringing them sorrow. My Margret, your father has been good to you all the days of your life——"

"You need not be afraid, mother," answered the girl. "I am not your own daughter; you need not be afraid that I shall ever wear out your dirty shift or stand in your shoes——"

Kristin turned a face flaming with wrath on her stepdaughter. Then she clutched the cross she wore about her neck tightly in her hand, and forced back the words that were on her lips.

She went to Sira Eiliv with this the same evening after Vespers, and she looked in vain in the priest's face for a sign—had the worst befallen already, and did he know it? She remembered her own wildered youth, and she remembered Sira Eirik's visage that betrayed nothing, while he lived day by day with her and her trusting parents, with her sinful secret locked in his bosom—and herself hard and dumb under his harsh threats and warnings. And she remembered the time after she had been lawfully betrothed to Erlend, when she herself showed her mother the gifts he had given her at Oslo. The mother's mien had been immovable in its calmness while she took things in her hand, one by one, looked at them, praised them, and laid them away.

She was in deadly, hopeless fear, and kept as wary a watch as she could on Margret. Erlend marked that there was something amiss with his wife, and one evening, when they had gone to rest, he asked if it was that she was with child again.

Kristin lay silent for a little before she answered that she believed it was so. And when her husband, on this, took her lovingly in his arms and asked no more, she could not bring herself to say that 'twas somewhat else that was weighing on her. But when Erlend whispered to her that this time she must do her devoir and give him a daughter,

she had no power to answer, but lay there stiff with dread, thinking that Erlend might come to know all too soon what kind of joy a man has of his daughters.

Some nights after this the folk at Husaby had gone to bed somewhat in drink and heavy with much eating, for it was in the last days before the Fast began—and thus all slept heavily. But well on in the night little Lavrans woke in his parents' bed and, still half asleep, began to whimper and cry for his mother's breast. But the time had now come for him to be weaned. Erlend woke up, grunted angrily, but took the boy and gave him milk from a cup that stood on the bed-step, and laid him down then at his other side.

Kristin had sunk again in deep drowsiness, when, of a sudden, she felt Erlend sit upright in the bed. Half awake, she asked what it was—he bade her hush, in a voice she did not know. Without a sound he slipped out of the bed; she marked that he was putting on some pieces of clothing, but when she raised herself on her elbow, he pressed her down again on the cushions with one hand while he leant in above her and took his sword, which hung above the bed-head.

He moved as silently as a lynx; but she felt that he had gone off to the ladder that led up to Margret's bower above the outer room.

For a moment she lay palsied with dread; then she sat up, found her shift and skirt, and groped in the dark for her shoes on the floor by the bed.

At the same moment a woman's shriek rang out from the loft-room —it must have been heard over the whole manor. Erlend's voice shouted a word or two—then she heard the ring of clashing swords and the trampling of feet up above—then the noise of a weapon falling on the floor, and a shriek of terror from Margret.

Kristin knelt crouching by the hearth—raked away the hot ashes with her bare hands and blew on the embers. When she had gotten the fir-root torch alight and held it up in her shaking hands, she saw Erlend high up in the darkness—he leapt down without heeding the ladder, bearing his naked sword in his hands, and ran out of the outer door.

From every side, in the darkness, the boys' heads peeped out. She went to the northern bed, where the three eldest slept, bade them lie down, and shut the bed-door. Ivar and Skule, who sat up on the bench where their beds had been made, blinking in fear and bewilderment at the light, she made creep into her own bed and shut them, too, in. Then she lighted a candle and went out into the court-yard.

It was raining—for one moment, while the light of her candle was mirrored in the wet-shining ice-crust, she saw a crowd of folk outside the door of the nearest house—the servants' quarter where Erlend's house-carls slept. Then her light was blown out—for a moment 'twas pitch-black night—but then Ulf Haldorssön came from the servants' quarter, bearing a lantern.

He bent down over a dark body that lay in a huddled heap on the wet lumpy ice. Kristin knelt down and felt the man's body with her hands—'twas young Haakon of Gimsar—and he was swooning or dead. Straightway her hands were covered with blood. Helped by Ulf, she turned and straightened out the body. The blood was gushing from the right arm, from which the hand had been cut off.

Unawares she cast a glance upward to where the shutter of the window-hole of Margret's bower was clapping in the wind. She could not see any face up there—but 'twas exceeding dark.

While she knelt in the puddles pressing Haakon's wrist with all her might to stop the gush of blood, she was dimly aware of Erlend's men standing around, half clad. Then she saw Erlend's grey, writhen face —with the skirt of his mantle he was wiping his bloody sword—he was naked beneath and his feet were bare.

"One of you, find me a band," she said, "and you, Björn, go up and wake Sira Eiliv—we must bear him up to the priest's house.

She took the leather strap that someone reached her and wound it tight around the stump of the arm. Of a sudden Erlend said, in a wild, hard voice:

"Let none touch him! Let the man lie where himself has laid him——"

"You know well, husband," said Kristin calmly, though her heart was beating till 'twas like to choke her, "that that cannot be."

Erlend thrust the sword-point hard against the ground.

"Aye—your flesh and blood it is not—that have I been made to feel each day in all these years."

Kristin rose and spoke softly, close in to him:

"Yet would I be fain for her sake that this should be hid—if hid it can be. You men"—she turned to the men that stood about—"are true enough to your master, I trow, not to speak of this till he has told you all of how this strife between Haakon and him came about?"

All the men answered, yes. One ventured forward—they had been wakened, he said, by hearing a woman shriek as though one were ravishing her—then straightway someone had leapt down on the roof of their house, but he must have slipt on the ice-crust, for they heard

something sliding down and then a heavy fall in the court-yard. But Kristin bade the man be silent. Now came Sira Eiliv running.

When Erlend turned and went in, his wife ran after him, trying to thrust past him. When he made for the loft-ladder, she got before him and caught him around the arms.

"Erlend—what would you do with the child?" she gasped out into his grey, wild face.

He made no answer—he tried to fling her aside, but she held fast to him.

"Stay, Erlend, stay—your child! You know not—the man was fully clad," she cried despairingly.

He gave a loud hoarse cry before answering—and she grew deathly white with horror—his words were so gross and his voice so changed by his wild agony.

Again she wrestled dumbly with the raging man that growled and gnashed his teeth together. At last she caught his eyes in the half-light:

"Erlend—let me go to her first. I have not forgotten the day when I was no better than Margret——"

Then he loosed her and, staggering back against the closet-wall, stood there quivering like a dying beast. Kristin went and lit a candle, then came back and went past him up to Margret in her bower.

The first thing the light fell on was a sword that lay on the floor not far from the bed, and, close by, a man's severed hand. Kristin tore off her head-dress, which, hardly knowing it, she had flung loosely round her flowing hair before she went out to the men. Now she threw it over those things lying on the floor.

Margret sat huddled together on the pillows of the bed-head gazing at Kristin's light with great wide-open eyes. She held the bed-clothes up about her, but her naked shoulders shone white through the golden locks of her hair. There was much blood all about the room.

The strain of Kristin's spirit burst in a vehement fit of weeping—'twas so miserable a sight to see the fair young child amidst all this horror. Then Margret shrieked aloud:

"Mother—what will Father do with me?"

Kristin could not help it—in the midst of her deep pity for the girl, her heart seemed to grow small and hard in her breast. Margret asked not what her father had done with Haakon. In a flash it came before her—Erlend lying on the ground, her father standing over him with a bloody sword, and she herself—— But Margret had

not moved from the spot. She could not hinder the old scornful dislike for Eline's daughter from coming up in her again, as Margret clung to her, shaking, wellnigh crazy with fear, and she sat down on the bed's edge, and strove to quiet the child a little.

So they sat when Erlend came up through the trap-door. He was fully clad now. Margret shrieked again, and hid in her stepmother's arms—Kristin looked up at her husband for a moment—he was calm now, but pale and strange of face. For the first time he looked as old as he was.

But when he said quietly: "You must go down, Kristin—I would speak with my daughter alone," she obeyed. She laid the girl down in the bed carefully, covered her up to the chin with the clothes, and then went down the ladder.

As Erlend had done, she dressed herself fully—'twas certain none at Husaby would sleep any more that night—and set herself to quiet the frightened children and serving-women.

The next morning, in a driving snowstorm, Margret's maid went weeping off the place with all her worldly goods in a sack on her back. Her master had driven her out with the direst words, and threats that she should be flayed alive because she had sold her mistress thus.

Then he put the rest of the serving-folk to the question—had not the maids suspected mischief when Ingeleiv in the autumn and winter had begun sleeping with them, instead of in Margret's bower? And how came it that the dogs had been locked inside their house? But they denied all, as 'twas like they would.

Last of all, he took his wife to task, they two alone. Heart-sick and weary, Kristin listened to him and strove to turn aside his injustice with soft answers. She denied not that she had been fearful, and she refrained her from saying that she had not spoken to him of her fear, because she had never reaped aught but unthankfulness from him when she had tried to counsel either him or Margret for the maid's good. But she swore by God and Mary Virgin that she had never known, nor could have thought, such a thing as that this man came to Margret in the loft at night.

"You!" said Erlend scornfully. "You say yourself you mind the time when you were no better than Margret—and the Lord God in heaven knows that you have let me mark, every day of the years we have lived together, that you remembered the wrong I did you—though your will was as good as mine, and your father and not I

caused much of the trouble by denying to let you wed me—*I* was willing enough from the first hour to make amends for the sin. When you saw the Gimsar gold"—he gripped her hand tightly and held it up so that the two rings she had had of him at Gerdarud glittered in the light—"knew you not what it meant? You have worn every day in these years the rings I gave you when you gave me your honour——"

Kristin was ready to sink down with weariness and sorrow; she answered in a low voice:

"I marvel, Erlend, if you still remember the time you overcame my honour——"

He buried his head in his arms, and flung himself down on the bench, tossing and writhing. Kristin sat down a little way off—she wished she could help her husband. She understood that this calamity fell yet more hardly upon him, because he himself had sinned against others in the same sort as now he had been sinned against. And he, who had never been willing to look his fault in the face in any trouble he himself had caused, could never bear to take the blame for this—and there was none else but she on whom he could fasten it. But she was not so much angered as sorrowful, and fearful of what now might come to pass.

Now and again she was above with Margret. The girl lay white and unmoving, staring before her. She had not yet asked what had befallen Haakon—Kristin knew not whether 'twas that she dared not, or that she was quite dulled by her own misery.

Well on in the afternoon Kristin saw Erlend and Klöng the Icelander going together through the thick falling snow to the armoury. But a short time passed, and Erlend came back alone. Kristin looked up a moment as he came into the light and passed her by—afterward she did not dare to turn her eyes toward the corner of the hall where he hid himself away. She had seen that he was quite broken.

Soon after, when she had an errand over at the storehouse, Ivar and Skule came running and told their mother that Klöng the Icelander was going away that evening—the boys were sad about it, for the clerk was a good friend of theirs. He was packing his things now, and was to go down to Birgsi to-night——

She had guessed already what must have befallen. Erlend had offered his daughter to the clerk, and he had refused to have a fallen maid. But what that parley must have meant to Erlend—she grew dizzy and sick and could not bear to think the thought out.

The day after, word came from the priest's house. Haakon Eindridessön prayed that he might have speech with Erlend. Erlend sent back in answer that he had naught more to say to Haakon. Sira Eiliv said to Kristin that if Haakon lived he would be crippled wholly —besides that he had lost his right hand, he had hurt his back and hips badly in falling from the roof of the servants' house. But he was set on coming home, even as he was, and the priest had promised to get him a sleigh. He repented his sin now with all his heart—he said that Margret's father had been within his rights, however the law might stand; but he was most fain that all should do their best to hush up the matter, so that his misdeed and Margret's shame should be hidden as much as might be. In the afternoon he was borne out to the sleigh, which Sira Eiliv had borrowed from Repstad, and the priest himself rode with him to Gauldal.

Thus the next day, which was Ash Wednesday, the Husaby folk had to go down to Vinjar to the parish church. But at the time of vespers Kristin had the acolyte let her into the chapel at home.

She could feel the ashes still on her forehead when she knelt down by her stepson's grave and said over the paternosters for his soul.

Not much but bones would be left of the boy now, down under his stone. Bones and the hair, and some shreds of the clothes they had been laid in. She had seen the bones of her little sister when they took her up that they might bring her to her father at Hamar. Dust and ashes—she thought of her father's comely visage, of her mother with the great eyes in the furrowed face, and the form that still kept so strangely young and slim and light, though her face grew old so early. There they lay under a stone, falling in sunder, as houses fall to ruin when the folks that lived there are gone. Pictures flitted and faded—the burned ruins of the church at home; a farm in Silsaadal that they used to ride by when they went to Vaage—the houses stood empty and were falling in pieces, the folk that tilled the lands dared not go nigh after the sun was down. She thought upon her beloved dead—their looks and their voices and smiles and ways and bearing—now that they themselves were gone away to yonder other country, to think on their shapes was sore; 'twas like remembering one's home when one knew that it stood desolate, and the rotting timbers were sinking into the soil.

She sat on the wall-bench in the empty church, and the smell of cold stale incense held her thoughts fast bound to pictures of death and the decay of all earthly things. And she was powerless to lift up

her soul to see a glimpse of the land where her beloved were, whither all goodness and love and truth at last were taken away and there treasured up. Every day when she prayed for the peace of their souls, it seemed to herself strange and unmeet that she should pray for them whose souls already on this earth had possessed a peace far deeper than she had ever known since she grew to be a woman. Sira Eiliv, indeed, said that prayer for the dead was good always—good for oneself, even if those others were already inheritors of God's peace.

But it helped not her. It seemed to her that when her weary body at last was rotting under a tombstone, her restless spirit would still be doomed to wander about somewhere near by, as an unhappy ghost wanders lamenting round the tumble-down houses of a ruined farm. For in her soul sin still had its being, as the root-tissue of the weeds is inwoven in the soil. It flowered and flamed and scented the air no longer, but 'twas still there in the soil, bleached, but strong and full of life. In despite of all the tenderness that welled up in her heart when she saw her husband's despair, she had not will or strength to stifle the voice in her that cried out, in bitterness and anger: Can you speak thus to *me*, have you forgotten the time when I gave you my troth and my honour, have you forgottten the time when I was your dearest love? And yet she knew that as long as this voice questioned thus within her, so long would she speak to him as though *she* had forgotten.

She flung herself in her thoughts before St. Olav's shrine; caught at the mouldering bones of Brother Edvin's hand far off in the church at Vatsfjeld; clenched her hands about the reliquaries with the shreds of a dead woman's shroud, and the splinters of the bones of an unknown blood-witness—caught for a safeguard at the small remains that through death and nothingness had kept a little of the virtue of the departed soul—like the magic power that clings about the rust-eaten swords dug up from ancient warriors' barrows.

The day after, Erlend rode into the city, taking with him only Ulf and one other man. All through the fast-time he came not home to Husaby, but Ulf came to fetch his body-guard and took them to meet him at the mid-fast Thing in Orkedal.

In talk with Kristin alone, Ulf told her that Erlend had agreed with Tiedeken Paus, the German goldsmith at Nidaros, that Margret should wed Tiedeken's son Gerlak as soon as Easter was past.

Erlend came home at Easter. He was quiet and calm now, but Kristin thought she could see that he would not be able to shake this

off as he had shaken off so much else—whether 'twas because he was no longer so young, or because nothing before had ever humbled him so deeply. Margret seemed quite heedless how her father was ordering things for her.

But one evening when man and wife were alone, Erlend said:

"Had she been my true-born child—or her mother an unwed woman—never would I have given her to a stranger while things are so with her; I could have sheltered and guarded both her and hers. This is an ugly way out, but, seeing what her birth is, a wedded husband can best safeguard her."

While Kristin was making all ready for her step-daughter's going, Erlend said one day, curtly:

"Belike you are scarce well enough to go with us to the city?"

"If you wish it, you know that I will go," said Kristin.

"Why should I wish it? Since before you have never stood in a mother's stead to her, there is no need you should do so now—and a joyous wedding 'twill scarce be. Lady Gunna of Raasvold and her son's wife have promised to come for our kinship's sake."

So Kristin stayed at Husaby, while at Nidaros Erlend gave his daughter to Gerlak Tiedekenssön.

3

THAT summer, just before St. John's Mass, Gunnulf Nikulaussön came back to his cloister. Erlend was in the city then for the Frosta Thing; he sent word to his wife asking her if she deemed she was able to come in thither to meet her brother-in-law. Kristin was none too well, but yet she came. When she met Erlend, he told her that his brother's health seemed to him quite broken down. They had made but little speed with their undertaking in the north, the Friars of Munkefjord. The church they had built they could never get consecrated, for the Archbishop could not journey so far north in these unquiet times; they had had to say mass the whole time at their travelling-altar. At length they came to lack both bread and wine and candles and oil for the services; and when Brother Gunnulf and Brother Aslak set sail for Vargöy to fetch these things, the Lapps had cast a spell on them, so that they capsized and had to sit for three days and nights on a rocky islet—after this they both fell sick, and Brother Aslak died some time after. They had suffered much from scurvy in the Long Fast, for they lacked both meal and herbs to eat with the dry fish. Therefore had Bishop Haakon of Björgvin and Master Arne (who were at the head of the Cathedral Chapter at Nidaros while the new Archbishop, Sir Paal, was gone to the Curia to be consecrated) ordered the monks who yet lived to come back home, and that the priests of Vargöy should tend the flock at Munkefjord till further order.

But though she was thus not unprepared, yet was Kristin dismayed when she saw Gunnulf Nikulaussön once more. She went with Erlend to the cloister the next day, and they were led into the parlour. The monk came in—his form was bent and crooked, the ring of hair was grown quite grey, under the sunken eyes the skin was wrinkled and dark-brown, but on the smooth white skin of the face were lead-coloured spots, and his hand showed like patches when he drew it out of the sleeve of his gown and held it out toward her. He smiled —and she saw that many of his teeth were gone.

They sat down and talked awhile, but it was as though Gunnulf had forgotten how to speak. He said as much himself before the others left him.

"But you, Erlend, are still the same—you seem not to have grown older," he said with a little smile.

Kristin knew well enough that she herself looked wretchedly just now. And Erlend was a comely sight, as he stood there tall and slender and dark and richly clad. And yet Kristin thought that he, too, had changed much—'twas strange that Gunnulf saw it not—he had used to be so sharp-sighted.

One day of late summer Kristin was in the clothes-loft, and Lady Gunna of Raasvold was with her—she had come to Husaby to help Kristin, now her lying-in was at hand. Standing there, they heard Naakkve and Björgulf singing out in the court-yard, while they sharpened their knives, a coarse ribald song which they were bawling at the top of their voices.

Their mother was beside herself with anger—she went down to the boys and chid them with the harshest words. And then she said she must know whom they learnt such things from—most like 'twas in the servants' house, but which of the men was it that taught children such things? The boys would not answer. Then Skule came out from under the loft-stairway, and said mother had best be still, for they had learnt the song from hearing father sing it.

Lady Gunna spoke up then; had they so little fear of God that they could sing such things—and now, when they could not know, any night when they lay down to rest, that they might not be motherless before cock-crow? Kristin said no more, but went quietly into the house.

After, when she had lain down for a little on her bed, Naakkve came in and went over to her. He took his mother's hand, but said nothing, and then he began to cry quite quietly. She spoke to him then mildly and jestingly, telling him not to weep or wail; she had won through this trouble six times, and surely she would win through the seventh time, too. But the boy wept more and more. At last she had to let him creep in between her and the wall, and there he lay weeping with his arms round her neck and his head against her breast; but she could not make him say for what he sorrowed so, though he lay there by her until the serving-woman bore in the supper.

Naakkve was now in his twelfth year; he was a great boy for his age, and was most fain to bear himself grown-up and manly; but he had a soft heart, and the mother could see sometimes that he was still most childlike. He was old enough to have been able to understand

his half-sister's mischance; the mother wondered if he understood, too, how much since then his father was changed.

Erlend had always been a man who could say the worst of things when he was enraged—but before this he had never given hard words to any save in wrath; and he had been quick to make all good when he himself was cool again. But now he could say hard and ugly things in cold blood. He had been a terrible man for cursing and swearing; yet had he, in some measure, left off this evil habit, because he saw it hurt his wife and gave offence to Sira Eiliv, for whom he had grown, little by little, to feel much respect. But never had he been foul-mouthed or unseemly in his talk—in that matter he had been much more modest than many a man who had led a purer life. Sorely as it hurt Kristin to hear such words on her young sons' boyish lips, most of all in the state she was in, and to hear that they had learnt them of their father, there was yet another thing which left the bitterest taste of all in her mouth: she saw that Erlend was still childish enough to deem he could brave out the shame of his daughter's fall by taking impure and unseemly words on his lips.

Fru Gunna had told her that Margret had had a still-born son a while before Olav's Mass. The lady had come to know, she said too, that Margret was already not so ill-content—she agreed well with Gerlak and he was kind to her. Erlend went to see his daughter when he was in the city, and Gerlak made a great to-do of his wife's father, though Erlend was none too forward to own the other as kinsman. Erlend himself had not named his daughter's name since she left Husaby.

Kristin bore yet another son; and he was christened Munan after Erlend's father's father. In all the time she lay in the little hall, Naakkve came daily in to his mother with berries and nuts he had plucked in the woods, or wreaths of healing herbs that he had plaited. Erlend came home when the new son was three weeks old; he sat much with his wife, and strove to be kind and loving—and this time he made no complaint because the new-born child was not a little maid, or because it was weakly and throve but ill. But Kristin made not much answer to his kind words; she was quiet and sadly brooding—and this time her strength came back to her exceeding slowly.

All through the winter Kristin was ailing, and the child seemed little like to live and thrive. Thus its mother had little thought to spare for aught else than the poor little being, and she heard with but

half an ear all the talk of the great tidings that were stirring this winter. King Magnus had fallen into the greatest straits for money by reason of his endeavours to win the lordship over Skaane, and he had called for succours from Norway. Some of the lords of the Council were willing to stand by him in this matter. But when his messengers came to Tunsberg, the Treasurer had gone away, and Stig Haakonssön, who was Governor in Tunsberghus, shut the gates of the castle against the King's men, and made ready to hold the place by force of arms. He had but few folk with him, but Erling Vidkunssön, who was his uncle by marriage, and was then at his manor in Aker, sent forty of his men-at-arms to strengthen the fortress, while he himself sailed westwards. Much about the same time the King's cousins, Jon and Sigurd Haftorssön, rose against the King, on account of a judgment that had been passed against some of their men. Erlend laughed at this, and said the Haftorssöns had shown themselves raw and foolish. There was great discontent now with King Magnus throughout the land. The nobles demanded that a High Steward should be put at the head of the affairs of the realm and the great seal placed in the hands of a Norseman, since the King, for the sake of his affairs in Skaane, seemed minded to spend most of his time in Sweden. The townsmen and the clergy in the cities had been frighted by the rumours of the King's borrowings from the German cities. The haughtiness of the Germans and their flouting of the laws and customs of the land were already greater than could be borne, and now 'twas said that the King had promised them yet greater rights and franchises in Norwegian cities, so that the state of things would become quite unbearable for the Norse traders, who were already hard put to it. Among the commons the rumours concerning King Magnus' secret sin were still wide-spread, and many of the parish priests and of the wandering monks were at one in this, if in nothing else, that they believed this was the cause why the Olav's Church in Trondheim had burned down. And so the farmers, too, sought in this the reasons for the many mischances that in these last years had visited now one and now another country-side—plagues among the cattle, blight in the corn, causing sickness and disease to man and beast, and bad harvests of corn and hay. So Erlend said, if only the Haftorssöns had had wit enough to hold still awhile yet and win themselves a name for open-handedness and chieftainly dealings, for sure folk would soon have called to mind that they were King Haakon's grandsons too.

These disorders qiueted down, but their upshot was that the King made Ivar Ogmundssön High Steward in Norway. Erling Vidkunssön,

Stig Haakonssön, the Haftorssöns and all their following were threatened with attainder of high treason. On this they yielded, came in, and made their peace with the King. There was a powerful man of the Uplands named Ulf Saksessön, who had joined in the Haftorssöns' rising; and he did not go with the others to make his peace, but came to Nidaros after Yule. He was much with Erlend in the city, and from him the folk north of Dovre had accounts of all these affairs, in the light he saw them in. Kristin greatly mistrusted this man; she knew him not, but she knew his sister, Helga Saksesdatter, who was wed with Gyrd Darre of Dyfrin. She was fair, but exceeding proud and haughty, and Simon liked her not, though Ramborg agreed well with her. Soon after the Fast was begun, letters came to the Wardens ordering that Ulf Saksessön be proclaimed an outlaw at the Things, but by that time he had left the land, having sailed in the depth of winter.

That spring Erlend and Kristin were at their town-house for Easter, and they had their youngest child, Munan, with them, for there was a sister at Bakke Cloister who was so skilled in leech-craft that all the sick children who were put in her hands got well, if so be it were not the will of God that they should die.

One day just after the holy-day, Kristin came home from the cloister with the little one. The serving-man and the maid who had been with her came with her into the hall. Erlend was alone there, lying on one of the benches. After the man was gone out and the woman had laid by their cloaks—Kristin had sat down by the fire with the child, and the maid was warming some oil they had gotten from the nun—Erlend began asking, from where he lay, what Sister Ragnhild had said of the child. Kristin gave short answers, as she sat unwrapping the child's swaddling-clothes; and at last she made no answer at all.

"Are things so ill with the child, Kristin, that you have no mind to speak of it?" he asked with a little impatience in his voice.

"You have asked this before, Erlend," answered his wife coldly, "and I have told you all there is to tell many times. But since you care not enough for the boy to remember it from one day to another——"

"It has chanced to me, too, Kristin," said Erlend, rising and coming over to her, "that I have had to answer you two and three times about things you yourself had asked of me, because you cared not to remember what I said."

"They were not things of such import as the children's health, I trow," she said in the same tone.

"They were not trifles, either—this last winter; I, at least, had them much at heart."

" 'Tis not true, Erlend. 'Tis many a long day since you talked to me of the things you have most at heart."

"Go out, Signe," said Erlend to the maid. He had flushed to the forehead—now he turned to his wife. "I understand what you would speak of. Of that matter I would not speak to you in your serving-maid's hearing—even if you are such good friends with her that you count it for nothing she should be by when you pick a quarrel with your husband, and tell me I speak untrue——"

" 'Tis the last thing a man sees, the beam in his own eye," said Kristin shortly.

"I understand not well what you mean. Never have I spoken ungently to you in strangers' hearing, or forgot to show you all honour and worship before our serving-folk."

Kristin burst into a strange, heart-sick, unsteady laugh.

"You are good at forgetting, Erlend! Through all these years has Ulf Haldorssön lived with us. Mind you when you sent him and Haftor to bring me to you in the sleeping-loft of Brynhild's house at Oslo?"

Erlend sank down on the bench, gazing at his wife, with parted lips. But she went on:

"Not much has befallen at Husaby—or elsewhere—of unseemly or dishonourable that you have taken thought to hide from your serving-folk—whether 'twere yourself or your wife it put to shame——"

Erlend sat still, looking at her in dismay.

"Mind you the first winter we were wed? I was with child of Naakkve, things were so that 'twas hard enough for me to win obedience and honour from my household. Mind you how you helped and stayed me? Mind you when your foster-father came to be our guest with strange ladies and maids and men, and our own folk sat at the board with us—mind you that Munan dragged off from me every rag I might have hid me with, and you sat mute and dared not stop his mouth——?"

"Jesus! Have you stored this up against me for fifteen years!" He looked up at her—his eyes, in that glance, seemed strangely light-blue, and his voice was weak and helpless. "Yet, my Kristin—methinks 'tis worse than this that we two should say unfriendly and bitter words to each other——"

"Aye," said Kristin, "worse indeed did it cut into my heart that time at our Yule-tide feast when you chid and rated me because I had thrown my cloak over Margret—and ladies from three counties were standing by and listening——"

Erlend made no answer.

"And now you blame me because things went with Margret as they did—when each time I tried to correct her with a word she would run to you, and you would bid me, in unfriendly words, to let the maid be—for she was yours and not mine——"

"Blamed you—I have not!" answered Erlend in a laboured voice, striving hard to speak calmly. "Had one of our children been a daughter, it had mayhap been easier for you to understand how such things as this that befell my daughter—how they pierce a father to the marrow——"

"I deemed I had shown you last year that I understood," said his wife in a low voice. "I needed but to think of my own father——"

"For all that," said Erlend, speaking quietly as before, "this was a worse thing. I was an unwed man. This man—was—wedded. I was not bound—I was not so bound," he corrected himself, "that I could never be set free——"

"And yet you did not free yourself," said Kristin. "Mind you how it came to pass that you were set free——?"

Erlend sprang up and struck her in the face. Afterward he stood gazing, aghast—a red mark came out on her white cheek. But she sat stiff and silent, with hard eyes. The child had begun to cry with fear—she rocked it a little in her lap and hushed it.

" 'Twas—'twas cruelly spoken, Kristin," said the man, in a shaken voice.

"Last time you struck me," she said softly, "I bore your child beneath my heart. Now have you struck me whilst I sat with your son upon my lap—"

"Aye, these children—we are never without them——" he cried impatiently.

They fell silent. Erlend began walking swiftly up and down the hall. She bore the child into the closet and laid it on the bed; when she came out through the closet-door, he stopped in front of her:

"I—I should not have struck you, my Kristin. I wish with my heart I had not done it—I shall repent it, I trow, for as long as I repented the last time. But you—you have taunted me because you deem I forget too lightly. But you forget naught—no single wrong that I ever did you. Yet I have tried—I have tried to be a good hus-

band to you; but that, I trow, you deem not worth remembrance. You —you are fair, Kristin——" He looked after her as she went past him.

Aye, the housewife's still and stately bearing was as beautiful as had been the young maid's supple loveliness; her bosom and hips were grown broader, but she was taller, too; she held herself upright, and the neck bore up the little round head proudly and graciously as ever. The pale, close-shut face with its great dark-grey eyes stirred and kindled him even as the round, rosy child-face had stirred and kindled his restless soul by its mysterious calm. He went over and took her hand:

"For me, Kristin, you are and ever will be the fairest of all women, and the dearest——"

She let him hold her hand, but gave not back the pressure of his. Then he flung it from him, as his bitterness overcame him again.

"Forgotten, say you I have? I trow 'tis not ever the worst of sins —to forget. I have never set up to be a pious man; but I remember what I learned of Sira Jon when a child, and God's ministers have reminded me of it since. 'Tis sin to brood and call back to mind the sins we have confessed to the priest and done penance for before God, and been granted His forgiveness for through the priest's hand and mouth. And 'tis not from holiness, Kristin, that you are ever tearing open these old sins of ours, but 'tis to have a weapon against me each time I go against you in aught——"

He walked away from her, and then came back.

"Greedy to rule—God knows that I love you, Kristin—yet do I see that you are greedy to rule, and never have you forgiven me that I did you wrong and tempted you to wrong. Much have I borne from you, Kristin, but I will no longer bear never to be left in peace for these old mischances, nor to have you speak to me as though I were your thrall——"

Kristin was shaking with passion as she answered:

"Never have I spoken to you as though you were a thrall. Have you *once* heard me speak harshly or angrily to any human being that could be counted as lesser than I—if it were the worst and most worthless of our servant-folk? I know myself free before God from the sin of having offended His poor in word or deed. But you should be my *master;* you should I obey and honour, bow myself before and stay myself on, next to God—according to God's law, Erlend. And if so be I have lost patience, and have spoken to you in such wise as it befits not a wife to speak to her husband—I trow it has been because you have many a time made it hard for me to bow my simplicity

before your better understanding, to honour and obey my husband and lord so much as I fain would have done—and maybe I looked that you—maybe I deemed I might spur you on to show that you were a man, and I but a poor simple woman——

"But take comfort, Erlend. I shall not offend you with my words any more, for after this day never shall I forget to speak to you as gently as though, in truth, you were born of thralls——"

Erlend's face flushed darkly red—he lifted his clenched fist—then turned sharp about on his heel, seized his cloak and sword from the bench by the door, and rushed out.

Without there was sunshine and a sharp wind—it was cold, but the bright sparkles that besprinkled him from house-eaves and from wind-swept trees were drops of water thawed out and frozen again in the air. The snow on the house-tops shone like silver, and behind the dark-green tree-clad hills around the town the mountains glittered cold blue and shining white in the bitter, bright, wintry spring day.

Erlend passed through streets and lanes—swiftly, at haphazard. He was boiling inwardly—*she* had been wrong, 'twas as clear as day she had been wrong from the first, and he had been right; and he had played the fool and struck her and made him seem less right—but the wrong *was* with her. What he should do with himself now, he knew not. He had no mind to go to any acquaintance' house, and home he would not go.

There was some hurry and bustle in the city. A big trader from Iceland—the first of the year—had come in to the wharves in the morning. Erlend wandered westward through the lanes, came out by St. Martin's Church, and went down toward the water-side alleys. Though 'twas early in the afternoon, already there was noise and yelling in the ale-houses and from the taverns. In his youth he had been able to go into such houses himself, with his friends and fellows. But now all the folks would stare the eyes out of their heads, and talk themselves hoarse afterwards, if the Warden of Orkdöla County, with his great house in the city, with ale and mead and wine at home to his heart's desire, should come into an ale-house and ask for a drink of their bad small beer. Yet truly this was what he had a mind to do—to sit and drink with small farmers in town for the day and serving-men and seamen. There was no to-do when those fellows caught their woman a buffet on the ear; and after that all was well again—hell and furies! how should a man rule a woman when he cannot thrash her soundly, by reason of her birth and his own hon-

our?—at bandying words the devil himself could be no match for them. Troll she was—and so fair, too—if only he could beat her till she grew good again. . . .

The bells began ringing from all the city churches to call folks together to Vespers—the spring wind mingled all the notes together in the unquiet air above his head. 'Twas like she was going to Christ's Church now, the holy troll—to bemoan her to God and Mary Virgin and holy Olav that her husband had hit her a buffet on the ear. Erlend sent up towards his wife's guardian saints a greeting of sinful thoughts, while the bells clashed and clanged and resounded. He made his way towards St. Gregory's Church.

His father and mother's graves were before St. Anne's altar in the northern aisle. Whilst he said over his prayers, he caught sight of Lady Sunniva Olavsdatter and her maid coming in at the church-door. When he had done praying, he went across and greeted her.

It had been the way of these two, ever since he had come to know the lady, that whenever they met they fell to somewhat free toying and jesting. And this evening as they sat on the wall-bench waiting for evensong to begin, he was so forward that she had more times than one to remind him that they were in church and that folk kept coming by them.

"Aye, aye," said Erlend, "but you are so fair to-night, Sunniva! 'Tis so good to jest with a lady that has such gentle eyes——"

"Little do you deserve, Erlend Nikulaussön, that I should look at you with gentle eyes," said she, laughing.

"Then will I come and jest with you when 'tis dark," said Erlend, laughing too. "When evensong is over, I will go home with you——"

Then the priests came into the choir, and Erlend went across to the southern aisle to take his place among the men.

When the service was at an end, he went out at the great door. He saw Lady Sunniva and her maid a little way down the street, and thought he had best not go with her, but go home straightway. At that moment a band of Icelanders from the trader came up the street; they staggered along, holding on to each other, and seemed as they would block the two women's passage. Erlend ran after the lady. As soon as the sailors saw a gentleman with a sword at his belt come toward them, they swerved aside and made room for the women to pass.

"I trow I had best go home with you, after all," said Erlend. "The city is none too quiet to-night."

"Can you believe it, Erlend?—old a woman as I am, maybe I like it not ill that some men think I am yet so fair, 'tis worth while blocking my way——"

There was but one answer that a courteous man could make to this.

He came home to his own house the next morning in the grey of dawn, and stood a little outside the locked door of the hall, frozen, dead-weary, heart-sore and sickened. Rouse the household with his knocking; go in and creep into bed beside Kristin lying with the child at her breast—no! He had on him the key of the eastern storehouse loft; there were some goods stored there that he was answerable for. He let himself in, pulled off his boots, and got together some webs of wadmal and some empty sacks and spread them on straw in the bedstead. He wrapped his cloak about him, crept under the sacks, and, tired out and harassed as he was, was able at last to forget everything in sleep.

Kristin was pale and weary with waking when she sat down to the morning meal with her house-folk. One of the men told her that he had prayed the master to come to breakfast—he was sleeping up in the east storehouse loft, he said—but Erlend had bidden him go to the devil.

Erlend had a tryst out at Elgesæter after the day-mass; he had to witness some dealings in land. But he managed to slip away from the feast that followed in the refectory, and from Arne Gjavvaldssön, who, like himself, could not stay and drink with the Brothers, but was set on having Erlend go with him to Ranheim.

Afterwards he repented that he had parted company with the others—dismay came over him as he went back alone to the town—now must he needs think over what he had done. For a moment he had a mind to go straightway to St. Gregory's Church—he had leave to confess to one of the priests there, when he was in Nidaros. But if he did this again, after he had confessed, the sin would be much greater. 'Twere better to wait awhile——

She must think now, Sunniva, that he was a chicken she had caught with her bare hands. But devil take him if he had ever thought a woman had been able to teach him so much that was new—here was he going about yawning still from the adventure. He had flattered himself he was not unskilled in *ars amoris*, or whatever the learned men called it. Had he been young and green, like enough he had been proud of himself and deemed it fine and brave. But he liked not the

woman—the mad creature—he was sick of her; he was sick of *all* women save his wife—and he was sick of her too! By the Cross itself—he had been so wedded to her that he had grown most holy himself—for he had believed in her holiness—but 'twas a fair reward he had had from his holy wife for his faithfulness and love—troll that she was! He remembered her scorching venomous words of the day before—so she deemed he bore himself as though he were born of thralls——! And the other, Sunniva, she thought, doubtless, he was naught but a raw weakling, since he had let himself be taken by surprise and had shown some dismay at her way of love-making. He would show her now that he was no more of a holy man than she was a woman. He had promised her to come down to Thorolf's town-house that night, and he might e'en as well go; the sin was sinned: why not enjoy any disport it might bring with it?

Since he had broken his troth to Kristin already—and she herself had brought it about, by her hateful and unjust ways toward him——

He went home, and wandered about the stables and outhouses seeking for somewhat to find fault with; he had words with the priest's serving-maid from the hospital because she had brought malt into his drying-house, though he knew well that his house-folk would have no use for the house this time while they were in the town. He wished he had had his boys here—they would have been some company—he wished he could set forth back to Husaby at once. But he must needs wait in the city for letters from the south—'twas too venturesome to have such things come to hand at one's home in the country.

The mistress of the house came not in to supper—she was lying down on the bed in the closet, said Signe, her maid, looking at her master reproachfully. Erlend answered harshly that he had not asked after her mistress. When the house-folk had left the hall, he went into the closet. It was pitch-dark in there. Erlend bent over the bed.

"Are you weeping?" he asked very low, her breath came so strangely. But she answered in a thick, husky voice that she was not weeping.

"Are you weary? Aye—I will go to rest, too, now," he said in the same low voice.

Kristin's voice quivered as she said:

"Then I had liefer, Erlend, that you should go and lie to-night where you lay last night."

Erlend made no answer. He went out and fetched the candle from the hall into the closet, and opened his chest of clothing. He was well clad enough already to go wherever he listed, for he still bore the vio-

let *kothardi* he had worn at Elgesæter in the morning. But now he changed his clothes slowly and deliberately—put on a red silk shirt and a mouse-grey knee-long velvet coat with little silver bells on the sleeve-points, brushed his hair, and washed his hands. Time and again he looked over toward his wife—she lay silent and motionless. Then he went out without bidding good night. Next day he came home openly at the breakfast-hour.

So things went on for a week. Then Erlend came home one evening from Hangrar where he had been on an errand and learnt that Kristin had ridden off that morning home to Husaby.

It had grown clear to him already that never had any man had less joy from a sin than he from these dealings of his with Sunniva Olavsdatter. In his heart he was so deadly weary of the crazy creature—sick of her even while he caressed and toyed with her. 'Twas a mad and reckless thing, too—like enough it was all over the town and the country-side by now, that he had his nightly resort in Thorolf's house—and to smirch his name for Sunniva's sake! Now and then he had thought, too, that the thing might raise some trouble—the woman had a husband, such as he was, old and sickly—'twas pity of Thorolf that he should be wed to such a wild and witless woman—most like *he* was not the first that had made free with the husband's honour. And Haftor—he had clean forgotten, when he had to do with Sunniva, that she was Haftor's sister—he remembered it only when it was too late. All was as bad as it could be—and now he could see that Kristin knew it.

She surely could not take it in her head to bring suit against him before the Archbishop—crave leave to depart from him. She had Jörundgaard to take refuge in—but it was impossible for her to travel thither over the mountains at this time of year, quite impossible if she would take the small children with her—and Kristin would not leave *them*. No—he thought, to comfort himself—and she could not go by sea either, with Munan and Lavrans, so early in the spring. Oh, but 'twould be unlike Kristin to crave the Archbishop's help against him—though she had good reason for it—but he would keep away from her bed of his own accord—till she saw that he repented from his heart. Kristin could never wish to have this thing publicly brought to question. But he knew in his heart that 'twas long since he had rightly known what his wife could or could not do.

He lay at night in his own bed, letting his thoughts go hither and thither. It dawned upon him that he had behaved yet more witlessly

than he had understood at first, to let himself be tangled in this wretched adventure, now, when he was in the thick of the greatest plans of State.

He cursed himself that he was still such a fool about his wife that she had been able to drive him to this. He cursed both Kristin and Sunniva. In the devil's name, sure he was no fonder on women than other men—rather he had had to do with fewer of them than most others that he knew of. But 'twas as though the foul fiend himself had the ordering of things for him—he could not come near a woman without finding himself up to the neck in a bog. . . .

There should be an end of it now. God be thanked and praised that he had other things on hand. Soon, soon, for sure, would he have Lady Ingebjörg's letters. Aye, in that matter, too, he had to reckon with women's whims; belike that was God's punishment for the sins of his youth. Erlend laughed to himself in the dark. The lady must see that things were as they had so clearly set them forth to her. The question was whether it should be one of her sons or the sons of her base-born sister that the Norsemen set up against King Magnus. And she loved her children by Knut Porse as she had never loved her other children.

Soon, soon, 'twould be the sharp wind and the salt sea breakers that should fill his embrace. God in heaven! it would be good to be drenched by the waves once again and have the wind blow freshness to his very marrow—be quit of all womankind for a long, delicious time.

Sunniva—she might think what she would. Thither he would go no more. And Kristin might fare to Jörundgaard if she would, for him. 'Twould mayhap be best and safest for her and the children if they were well out of the way in Gudbrandsdal this summer. Afterward there was no fear but he could make friends with her again. . . .

Next morning he rode up into Skaun. Say what he would, he could not rest till he had made sure what his wife meant to do.

She met him with gentle, cold courtesy when he reached Husaby late in the day. She spoke not a word to him of her own accord, nor any unfriendly word; and she said naught against it when, in the evening, as if feeling his way, he came over and lay down in their bed. When they had lain awhile, he tried, falteringly, to lay a hand on her shoulder.

Kristin's voice shook, but Erlend could not tell whether it were in sorrow or from anger, as she whispered:

"So base a man I trow you are not, Erlend, that you would make this

worse for me than need be. I cannot strive with you, with our children sleeping around us. And since I have seven sons by you, I would be loath that our house-folk should see that I know I am a wronged wife——"

Erlend lay long silent before he ventured to answer:

"Aye. God have mercy on me, Kristin, I have wronged you. I had not—had not done it if I could have taken more lightly the cruel words you said to me that day at Nidaros. It is not so that I am come home to beg you for forgiveness; for I know well that that would be a great thing to ask you now——"

"I see that Munan Baardssön spoke true," answered his wife; "the day will never come when you will stand up and take the blame on yourself for what you have done amiss. 'Twere best you turned you to God and sought to make your peace with Him—you have less need to ask my forgiveness than His——"

"Aye, so much I can see," said Erlend bitterly. After this they spoke no more. And the next morning he rode back to Nidaros.

He had been in the city some days when Lady Sunniva's woman came to him one evening in St. Gregory's Church. It seemed to Erlend that after all it were well he should speak with the lady one last time; and he bade the girl keep watch that night—he would come by the same way as before.

He had had to creep and clamber about like a poultry-thief to come up into the loft where they had their meetings. It made him sick with shame now to think he had been such a fool—a man of his age and his place. But at first he had deemed it sport to play such youthful pranks.

The lady was in bed when he came in.

"Come you at long last and so late?" she laughed, and yawned. "Quick now, love, and come to bed; and we can talk afterward about where you have been so long——"

Erlend knew not rightly what to do, or how to tell her what he had at heart. Without thinking, he began to loose the fastenings of his dress.

"Foolhardy is it, this that we have done, Sunniva—I trow it were not well that I should stay here to-night. Thorolf must be looked for home ere long?" he said.

"Are you frighted at my husband?" asked Sunniva teasingly. "You saw yourself Thorolf never so much as pricked up an ear when we toyed and jested before his very eyes. Should he hear that you

have been coming about the house, I warrant I make him believe that it is but the old foolery. He trusts me all too well——"

"Aye, it seems indeed that he trusts you all too well," laughed Erlend, burying his fingers in the bright hair on her firm white shoulders.

"Say you so?" She caught him round the wrist. "Yet you trust your wife, too. And *I* was yet modest and shamefast when Baard wedded me——"

"*My* wife we will leave outside of this matter," said Erlend sharply, letting go his hold.

"Why so——? Think you 'tis more unseemly that we should speak of Kristin Lavransdatter than of Sir Thorolf, my husband?"

Erlend set his teeth hard and made no answer.

"Methinks you are one of those men, Erlend," said Sunniva mockingly, "that think you are so winning and fair that it can scarce be reckoned a fault in a woman that her virtue was as frail as glass against you—she may be staunch as steel against all others."

"Of you I have never thought so," answered Erlend coarsely.

Sunniva's eyes gleamed:

"What would you with me, then, Erlend—since you were so happily wedded?"

"I have said, you shall not name my wife——"

"Your wife or my husband——"

" 'Twas ever you that began to speak of Thorolf; and 'twas you that scoffed at him worst," said Erlend bitterly. "And if you had not flouted him in words—'twas plain enough how dear you held his honour, when you took another man to you in your husband's place. *She*—is not brought low by my misdoing."

"Is this what you would say to me—that you love Kristin, though you like me well enough to play with me——?"

"I know not how well I like you—you showed that you liked me——"

"And Kristin sets not your love at its true worth?" she scoffed. "I have seen well enough how gently she is used to look on you, Erlend."

"Hold your tongue, now!" shouted the man. "Maybe she knew what I deserved!" he said harshly and savagely. "You and I may well be each other's like——"

"Is it so," asked Sunniva threateningly, "that I was to be but a whip for you to lash your wife with?"

Erlend stood breathing hard:

"Call it so, if you will. But you laid yourself ready to my hand."

"Beware," said Sunniva, "that that whip smite not yourself——"

She sat up in the bed and waited. But Erlend offered not to gainsay her or to seek to make up the quarrel. He re-dressed fully and left her without a word.

He was not greatly pleased with himself, or with the fashion in which he had parted from Sunniva. There was small honour in it for him. But it could not be helped—and at least he was quit of her now.

4

THIS spring and summer not much was seen of the master at Husaby. At such times as he was at the manor, he and his wife met each other with courtesy and friendliness. Erlend in no way tried to break down the wall she now built up between them, though he would often look after her searchingly. For the rest, he seemed to have much to think on outside his home. Touching the management of the estate, he never asked a single word.

It was this matter of the estates his wife brought forward when, just after the spring Holy Cross day, he would have had her go with him to Raumsdal. He had business in the Uplands—would she not take the children with her, stay awhile at Jörundgaard, and see her kinsfolk and friends in the Dale? But Kristin would on no account agree to this.

He was in Nidaros at the time of the Lagthing, and afterward out in Orkedal; then he came home to Husaby, but at once busied himself making ready for a journey to Björgvin. *Margygren* was lying out at Nidarholm, and he but waited for Haftor Graut, who was to sail along with him.

Three days before Margaret's Mass * they began the hay-harvest at Husaby. It was the fairest weather, and when the haymakers went back to the meadows after the midday rest, Olav, the foreman, got leave for the children to go with them.

Kristin was in the clothing storehouse that was in the second storey of the armoury building. The house was so built that an outer stairway led up to this room, which had a balcony before it; the third storey —the armoury itself—stood out above the balcony, and it could be reached only by a loose ladder from the clothing loft leading to a trap-door on the floor. The trap-door was open, for Erlend was up in the armoury.

Kristin bore out the fur cloak that Erlend was to take with him for the sea-voyage, and shook it out in the balcony. Then she was ware of the noise of a great company of horsemen, and at the same moment she saw folks come riding out of the woods on the Gauldal road. The next moment Erlend stood by her side.

* 10th June.

"Was it so, did you say, Kristin, that the fire in the kitchen was put out this morning?"

"Aye—Gudrid upset the broth-cauldron. We must borrow a light from Sira Eiliv——"

Erlend looked across at the priest's house.

"No; he must not be mixed in this. Gaute," he called softly to the boy, who was loitering under the balcony, lifting one rake after another, unwilling to set out to the haymaking. "Come up hither, up the stairs—no farther, or they might see you."

Kristin gazed at her husband. Like this she had never seen him before—the strained, alert calm in his voice, in his face, as he spied out southward along the road—in the whole of his tall supple form as he ran into the loft and came back at once with a flat packet, sewn up in linen cloth. He gave it to the boy:

"Hide this in your breast—and mark well what I say to you. You must save these letters—more is at stake than you can understand, my Gaute. Put your rake over your shoulder and go quietly down across the fields till you come to the alder-thickets. Keep well among the bushes till you get down to the wood—you know all the paths there, I know—and creep through the thickest brush all the way across to Skjoldvirkstad. When you get there, make sure first that all is quiet on the farm. Should you see signs of aught amiss or of strangers about, then hide you. But should you be sure all is safe, go down to the farm and give this to Ulf, if he be at home. But if you cannot give the letters into his hands while you are sure that none is near, burn them the moment you can come by the wherewithal to do it. But be sure that both writing and seals are altogether burnt up, and that they come not into any man's hands but Ulf's. God help us, my son—these be great matters to put in the hands of a boy of ten winters—the lives and welfare of many good men—understand you that much is at stake, Gaute?"

"Aye, father. I have understood all that you have said to me." Gaute looked up from the stairway, his little fair face full of earnestness.

"Say to Isak, if Ulf is not at home, that he must ride straight out to Havne and on all night—and tell them he wots of, that a head wind has sprung up, and I fear me evil spells have spoiled my journey. Do you understand?"

"Aye, Father. I mind well all you have said to me."

"Go, then. God keep you, my son."

Erlend ran up into the armoury, and would have closed the trap-

door, but Kristin was already half-way through the opening. He waited till she was up, then shut the trap, ran over to a chest, and took out some written parchments. He tore the seals off and trampled them to pieces on the floor, tore the parchments into rags and wrapped them together round the key of the chest and dropped the little bundle from the window-hole into the midst of the nettles that grew high behind the storehouse. With his hands on the window-frame, he stood gazing after the little boy walking along the edge of the cornfield down toward the meadow, where the mowers were moving forward in a line, plying their scythes and rakes. When Gaute disappeared into the little copse between the cornfield and the meadow, he closed the shutter. The noise of hoofs came loudly now and from near by.

Erlend turned toward his wife:

"Can you have what I threw out but now, made away with?—send Skule, he has his wits about him—tell him to fling it down into the pit behind the byre. Like enough they will keep an eye on you, and mayhap on the big boys, too. But they will scarce search you——" He put the fragments of the seals down inside the bosom of her dress. "None could make them out, methinks; but yet——"

"Are you in peril, Erlend?" she asked quietly. When he had looked into her face, he drew her outspread arms around him. For a moment he pressed her to him:

"I know not, Kristin. We shall see soon, I trow. Tore Eindridessön rides at the head of the men, and Sir Baard is with them, if I saw aright. I can scarce deem that Tore comes hither for any good——"

The horsemen were in the court-yard now. Erlend stood still a moment. Then he kissed his wife vehemently, opened the trap-door, and ran down. When Kristin came out into the balcony, she saw Erlend in the court-yard helping the Treasurer, who was an old man and a heavy, to dismount from his horse. There were thirty men-at-arms, at least, with Sir Baard and the Warden of Gauldöla County. As Kristin crossed the yard, she heard the Warden say:

"I bring you greetings from your cousins, Erlend. Borgar and Guttorm Trondssöns are the King's honoured guests at Veöy, and I trow Haftor Toressön will have paid a friendly visit by this time to Ivar and the young lad at their home at Sundbu. Sir Baard took the Graut into keeping in the city yestermorn."

"And now I see you are come hither to bid me to this same meeting of the guardsmen," said Erlend, smiling.

"So it is, Erlend."

"And doubtless you would search my manor here, too? Oh, I have done my part in such affairs so often that I ought to know the way 'tis done."

"Such great affairs as a high treason cause you have scarce had in your hands," said Tore.

"No, not before now," said Erlend. "And it looks as though I were playing with the black men, Tore, and you had mated me—is it not so, kinsman?"

"We must find forth the letters you have had from Lady Ingebjörg Haakonsdatter," said Tore Eindridessön.

"They are in the chest covered with red leather up in the armoury—but there is not much in them save such greetings as dear kinsfolk use to send to each other—and they are all old. Stein here can take you up."

The stranger horsemen had dismounted now, and the house-folk were coming crowding into the court-yard.

"There was more in the one we took from Borgar Trondssön," said Tore. Erlend whistled softly.

"We had best go into the hall," he said; "it begins to grow crowded here."

Kristin followed the men into the hall. At a sign from Tore, two of the stranger men-at-arms came with them.

"You must give up your sword, Erlend," said Tore of Gimsar, when they stood within, "for a sign that you are our prisoner."

Erlend smote his thighs to show that he wore no other weapon than the dagger in his belt. But Tore said again:

"You must reach us your sword for a token——"

"Aye, aye, if all is to be done to such a nicety——" said Erlend, laughing a little. He went over and took his sword from its peg, and holding the scabbard, held out the hilt to Tore Eindridessön with a little bow.

The old man of Gimsar loosened the fastenings, drew the blade right out, and ran his fingers along its groove.

"Was it this sword, Erlend, that you——?"

Erlend's blue eyes glittered like steel, his mouth grew narrow and straight-lipped:

"Aye. 'Twas with this sword I chastised your grandson when I found him with my daughter."

Tore stood holding the sword; he looked down at it and spoke threateningly:

"You that should uphold the law, Erlend—you must sure have

known that that time you went a little farther than the law would follow you——"

Erlend threw back his head, flushing, and said hotly:

"There is a law, Tore, that cannot be set aside by Kings or Thingmen—his women's honour a man may guard with the sword——"

"Well for you, Erlend Nikulaussön, that no man has put that law to use against you," answered Tore of Gimsar malignantly. "Else had you need of as many lives as a cat——"

Erlend said with stinging slowness of speech:

"Think you not this matter is so grave that 'tis untimely to mix up with it old stories from my youth?"

"I know not if Thorolf of Lensvik deems those matters are so old."

Erlend flamed up and would have answered; but Tore shouted:

"You should try first, Erlend, whether your mistresses have skill to read writing, before you run about to nightly trysts with secret letters in your waist-band! Ask you of Baard there who it was that warned us that you were hatching traitorous counsels against your King that you have sworn troth to, and hold your place in fee from——"

Unwittingly Erlend raised a hand to his breast—he glanced for a moment at his wife, and his face flushed darkly. Then Kristin ran forward and threw her arms about his neck. Erlend looked down into her face—he saw naught in it but love:

"Erlend—husband."

The Treasurer had scarce spoken a word hitherto. Now he went over to the pair and said softly:

"Dear lady—mayhap it would be best that you take the children and your serving-women with you into the women's house, and stay there as long as we are on the manor."

Erlend loosed his wife, with a last pressure of his arm about her shoulders.

"It is best so, my own Kristin—do you as Sir Baard counsels."

Kristin lifted herself on tiptoe and offered him her mouth to kiss. Then she went out into the court-yard. And out of the confused throng of folks she gathered together her children and serving-women, and carried them with her into the little hall—other women's house there was not at Husaby.

For some hours they sat there, and the mistress' calm and steadfastness kept the frightened little company's terror somewhat in check. Then Erlend came in, disarmed and clad as for a journey. Two stranger men-at-arms took post down by the door.

He took his eldest sons by the hand, and then lifted the little ones in his arms, while he asked where Gaute was—"but you must greet him from me, Naakkve. He is run off to the woods with his bow, I warrant, as his wont is. Tell him he can have my English long-bow after all—I denied it him when he asked for it on Sunday."

Kristin crushed him to her without a word.

"When will you come back, Erlend dearest?" she whispered pleadingly.

"That must be as God will, my wife."

She drew back from him, struggling that she might not break down. He was never used to speak to her but by her christened name, and these last words of his shook her to the very heart. It was as if only now she understood to the full what it was that had befallen.

At the sunset hour Kristin sat up on the hill north of the houses. She had never seen the sky so red and golden before. Above the hill right over against her lay a great cloud; it was shaped like a bird's wing, it glowed within like iron in the forge, it shone clear as amber. Little golden wisps like feathers loosed themselves from it and floated out into the sky. And deep below on the lake in the valley-bottom the sky was mirrored with the cloud and the hill-side above it—it seemed as though it were from down there in the depths that the burning glow streamed up to tinge all that lay before her.

The grass in the meadows was seeding, and its silken spikes shone darkling red in the red light from the sky; the barley was in ear, and caught the radiance on its young silky-bright beards. The turf house-roofs of the manor were thick with sorrel and buttercups, and the sunlight lay in broad rays across them; the blackish shingles of the church-roof glowed darkly, and the light stones of the walls were softly gilded.

The sun broke forth beneath the cloud, rested on the mountain-crest and sent his light out over range behind range of wooded hills. The evening was so clear—the light showed up to sight little clearings among the pine-covered hill-sides; she could see sæters and little farms in among the woods that she had never before known one could see from Husaby. Great hill masses, deep violet in hue, rose in the south, in toward Dovre, where else there were wont to be clouds or haze.

The least of the bells in the chapel below began to ring, and the church-bell at Vinjar answered. Kristin sat bowed over her folded hands, till the last of the three triple strokes died away on the air.

Now the sun was below the mountain-top, the golden radiance grew

paler and the red more rosy and soft. After the bells had fallen silent, the soughing of the woods seemed to grow again and spread abroad; the noise of the little beck that ran through the leafwoods down in the valley sounded louder on the ear. From the close near by came the well-known clinking from the bells of the home cattle; a flying beetle hummed half-way round about her, and was gone.

She sent a last sigh after her prayers—a prayer for forgiveness because her thoughts had been elsewhere while she prayed.

The great goodly manor lay below her on the hill-side, like a jewel on the hill's broad bosom. She looked out over all the lands that she had owned along with her husband. Thoughts of this estate, cares for it, had filled her mind to the brim. She had worked and striven—never till to-night had she known herself how she had striven to set this manor on its feet and keep it safe—nor all she had found strength to do and how much she had compassed.

She had taken it as her lot, to be borne patiently and unflinchingly, that all this rested on her shoulders. Even so she had striven to be patient and to hold her head high under the burden her life laid on her, each time she knew she had again a child to bear under her heart—again and again. With each son added to the flock, she had felt more strongly the duty of upholding the welfare and safety of the house—she saw to-night, too, that her power to overlook the whole, her watchfulness, had grown with each new child she had to watch and strive for. Never had she seen so clearly as this evening what fate had craved of her and what it had granted her, in giving her these seven sons. Over again and over again had joy in them quickened the beating of her heart, fear for them pierced it—they were her children, these great lads with their lean angular boys' bodies, as they had been when they were so small and plump they could scarce hurt themselves when they tumbled in their journeys between the bench and her knee. They were hers, even as they had been when, as she would lift one of them from the cradle up to her breast for milk, she had to hold up its head, because it nodded on the slender neck as a bluebell nods on its stalk. Wherever they might wander out in the world, whithersoever they might fare, forgetful of their mother, she felt as though for her their life must still be an action of her life, they must still be as one with herself as they had been when she alone in all the world knew of the new life which lay hidden within and drank of her blood and made her cheeks pale. Over again and over again had she proved the sickening sweating terror when she felt: now her time was come again, now again was she to be dragged under in the breakers of

travail—till she was borne up again with a new child in her arms; how much richer and stronger and braver with each child, never till to-night had she understood.

And yet she saw to-night that she was still the Kristin of Jörundgaard, who had never learned to endure an ungentle word, because she had been shielded all her days by so strong and tender a love. In Erlend's hands she was still the same. . . .

Aye. Aye. Aye. 'Twas true that she had gone on storing up, year in, year out, the memory of every wound he had dealt her—though she had known always that he had wounded her, not from ill will as a grown man wounds another, but as a child strikes his playfellow in their play. She had tended the memory of each time when he had offended her, as one tends a festering sore. And every abasement he had brought upon himself by following his own every whim struck her like a whip-stroke on the flesh, and left a running weal. 'Twas not so that she willingly and of purpose stored up grudges against her husband; she knew that toward others she was not petty-minded, but when he was concerned she grew so straightway. When Erlend was in question, she could forget nothing, and every least scratch on her soul went on smarting and bleeding and swelling and throbbing, when 'twas he that had dealt it her.

Toward him she never grew wiser, never stronger. She might strive to seem, in her life with him too, capable and brave and strong and pious, but 'twas not true that she was so. Ever, ever had longing gnawed within her—the longing to be again his Kristin of the woods of Gerdarud.

In those days she had been willing to do all that she knew was evil and sinful, rather than lose him. To bind Erlend to her, she had given him all that was hers: her love and her body, her honour and her part in the salvation of her Lord. And she had given him what she could find to give that was not hers: her father's honour and his trust in his child; all that wise and prudent grown men had built up to safeguard a little maid in her nonage she had overturned; against their plans for the welfare and advancement of their race, against their hopes that their work would bear fruit when they themselves lay under the mould, she had set her love. Much more than her own life had she staked in the game, wherein the sole prize was Erlend Nikulaussön's love.

And she had won. She had known, from the time when he kissed her for the first time in the garden by Hofvin, even till to-day when he kissed her in the little hall before he was led away a prisoner from

his home—Erlend loved her as his own life. And if he had not guided her life well, yet had she known wellnigh from the first hour she met him how he had guided his own. If he had not ever dealt well by her, yet had he dealt better by her than with himself.

Jesus, how she had won him! She confessed to herself this evening—she herself had driven him to breach of his marriage-vows by her coldness and by her venomous words. She confessed to herself now—even in these years when she had looked on, time and again, at his unseemly dalliance with this woman Sunniva, and had been angered by it, she had felt in the midst of her wrath a haughty and defiant joy—none knew of any open stain on Sunniva Olavsdatter's honour, yet Erlend talked and jested with her as a serving-man might with an ale-house wench. And of her he had known that she could lie and betray those that trusted her best, that she willingly let herself be lured to the most shameful places—yet had he trusted her, yet had he honoured her so far as in him lay. Easy as it was for him to forget all fear of sin, easy as it had been for him to break his promise made to God at the altar, yet had he sorrowed over his sins against her, and had struggled for years that he might be able to keep his promises to her.

She had chosen him herself. She had chosen him in a frenzy of love, and she had chosen anew each day of those hard years at home at Jörundgaard—chosen his wild reckless passion before her father's love that would not suffer the wind to blow ungently upon her. She had thrown away the lot her father had shaped for her, when he would have given her to the arms of a man who would surely have led her by the safest ways, and would have stooped down, to boot, to take away each little stone that she might have dashed her foot against. She had chosen to follow the other, who she knew was straying in perilous paths. Monks and priests had pointed the way of repentance and atonement to lead her home to peace—she had chosen turmoil, rather than let slip her darling sin.

So there was but one way for her—not to murmur or cry out, whatever should befall her at this man's side. Dizzily far behind her it seemed now, the time when she had left her father. But she saw his beloved face, remembered his words that day in the smithy when she dealt his heart the last stab, remembered their talk together up in the mountains in the hour when she saw that the door of death stood ajar waiting for him. Unworthy is it to murmur at the lot one has chosen for oneself.—Holy Olav, help me that now I may not show me altogether unworthy of my father's love!

Erlend, Erlend—— When she met him in her youth, life had become for her a swift river rushing over rocks and rapids. In these years at Husaby, life had spread out, lying wide and ample like a lake, mirroring all that surrounded her. She remembered, at home, when the Laagen overflowed in springtime, and lay grey and mighty in the valley-bottom, bearing on its bosom the driftage that came floating, while the tops of the growing leaf-trees in its course swayed on the waters. Out in its midst showed little dark threatening eddies, where the current ran swift and wild and perilous under the shining surface. Now she knew that even so had her love for Erlend run like a swift and perilous current beneath the surface of her life through all these years. Now 'twas bearing forward—she knew not to what.

Erlend, beloved——!

Once more Kristin breathed an Ave out into the evening glow. Hail Mary, full of grace! I dare pray thee but for one mercy, that see I now: Save Erlend, save my husband's life——!

She looked down at Husaby and thought of her sons. Now when the manor lay there in the evening light like a dream vision that might melt away—now that fear for her children's doubtful fate shook her heart, it came to her mind: Never had she thanked God fully for the rich fruits her toil had borne in these years; and never had she thanked him as she ought that seven times He had granted her a son.

Out of the dome of the evening heaven, from all the country-side beneath her eyes, came the murmured words of the mass that she had heard thousands of times, in her father's voice that had set forth the words for her when she was a little child at his knee: Thus sings Sira Eirik in the *Præfatio*, when he turns him to the altar, and thus it says in the Norse tongue:

It is truly meet and just, right and available to salvation, that we should always, and in all places, give thanks to Thee, O holy Lord, Father Almighty, eternal God.

When she lifted up her face from her hands, she saw Gaute coming up the hill. Kristin sat still and waited till the boy stood before her, then she stretched out her hand and took his. There was grassy sward a good way round the stone where she was sitting, with no place where any might hide.

"How did you do your father's errand, my son?" she asked softly.

"As he bade me, mother. I came to the farm so that none saw me. Ulf was not at home, so I burned what father had given me on the

hearthfire in the hall. I took it out of the cloth." He hesitated a little. "Mother—there were nine seals to it——"

"My Gaute." The mother moved her hands up till they rested on the boy's shoulders, and looked into his face. "Your father has had to lay great matters in your hands. If you deem that you cannot but speak of them to someone, then tell your mother what is weighing on you. But best of all would it like me if you could altogether be silent, my son."

The light-hued face under the smooth flaxen hair, the great eyes, the full, firm red mouth—how like he was to her father now! Gaute nodded. Then he laid an arm on his mother's shoulder.

Sweetly and sorrowfully it came on Kristin that now she could lean her head against the boy's spare little breast; he was so tall now that when he stood and she sat, her head reached to just above his heart. For the first time it was she that leaned against her child.

Gaute said:

"Isak was alone at home. I showed him not what I was bearing, but said only that I had somewhat I must burn. So he made up a big fire on the hearth before he went out to saddle his horse."

His mother nodded. Then he let her go of her, turned toward her, and said, with childish awe and wonder in his voice:

"Mother, know you what they say? They say that father—would have been *King*——"

"It sounds not over-likely, boy——" she answered with a smile.

"But he is of kingly birth, my mother," said the boy earnestly and proudly. "And methinks father would be fitter to be a King than most men."

"Hush." She took his hand again. "My Gaute—you must understand, now that Father has shown such trust in you—you and we all must say nor think nothing, but must watch our tongues well till we have learnt somewhat, so that we can judge whether and how we should speak. I ride to Nidaros to-morrow, and if I come to speech with your father alone at any time, I shall surely tell him that you have done his errand well——"

"Take me with you, mother!" begged the boy vehemently.

"We must not let any think, Gaute, that you are aught else than a thoughtless child. You must try, little son, to play about here at home and be as joyful as you can—so will you serve your father best."

Naakkve and Björgulf came slowly up the hill. They came up to their mother and stood there, their young faces strained with feeling.

Kristin saw they were still so far children that they took refuge with their mother in this disquietude—and yet were come so far toward manhood that they would fain have comforted her and heartened her, if they could but find the way. She held out a hand to each of the boys. But not much was said between them.

Soon after, they all went down, Kristin with a hand on a shoulder of each of her two eldest sons.

"Why are you looking so at me, Naakkve?" But the boy grew red, turned away his head, and made no answer.

He had never before thought about his mother's looks. It was many a long day since he had begun to compare his father with other men—his father was the most comely of them all, and the most like a chieftain. His mother was the mother that had new children, who, as they grew from out the hands of the women, joined the little troop of brothers, to share its life in fellowship, its friendship and its strife; mother had open hands through which flowed all that they needed; mother knew what to do for wellnigh all ills; mother was like the fire on the hearth, she bore the life of the home as the lands round about Husaby bore the crops year by year; life and warmth streamed from her as from the cattle in the byre or the horses in the stalls. The boy had never thought of likening her to other women. . . .

This evening he saw all at once: she was a proud and fair lady. With the broad, white forehead under the linen coif, the steel-grey eyes' straight gaze under the calmly arched brows; with the heavy bosom and the long, shapely limbs. She bore her tall body straight as a lance. But he could not speak of this; he walked on flushed and silent with her hand upon his neck.

Gaute walked behind Björgulf and held by his mother's belt. The elder brother began grumbling because Gaute was treading on his heels —the two set to pushing and scuffling a little. The mother stopped the quarrel and bade them be quiet, and, so doing, her grave face softened into a smile. After all they were but children, her sons.

Kristin lay awake at night—Munan was sleeping at her breast, and Lavrans between her and the wall.

She tried to come to some judgment of her husband's case. She could not believe the peril could be so great. Erling Vidkunssön and the King's cousins at Sudrheim had been charged with disloyalty and treason; yet were they back at their homes now as safe and as rich as ever, though they stood not so high as before in the King's favour.

'Twas like that Erlend had engaged in some unlawful courses to serve Lady Ingebjörg. In all these years he had kept up the friendship with his noble kinswoman; she knew that he had given her some sort of unlawful aid that had to be kept secret, five winters ago when he was her guest in Denmark. Now that Erling Vidkunssön had taken up the lady's cause, and would have put her in possession of the estates she owned in Norway, it might well be that Erling had counselled her to go to Erlend, or that she had turned to her father's kinsman of her own accord, after Erling had made his peace with the King. And that Erlend had dealt foolhardily with the matter. . . .

But she could not well understand how her kinsfolk at Sundbu could be mixed up in this.

Yet 'twas impossible that the end of the matter could be aught else than that Erlend came to full atonement with the King, if all his offence was to have been too zealous in the King's mother's service.

High treason. She had heard of Audun Hestakorn's downfall—and his death on the gallows at Nordnes—it was in her father's youth that it befell. But frightful misdeeds had been charged against Sir Audun. No; she would not think on such things. 'Twas so little likely that Erlend's cause should have a worse outcome than—than Erling Vidkunssön's and the Haftorssöns' for example.

——Nikulaus Erlendssön of Husaby. Ah, now it seemed so to her, too—Husaby was the fairest manor in Norway's land.

She would go to Sir Baard and find out all that could be known. The Treasurer had always been her friend. Olav Lagmand, too—in former days. But Erlend had taken it in such bad part when the Lagmand's decree went against him in that suit about the town-house. And Olav had taken so much to heart the mischance that had befallen his god-daughter's husband.

Near kinsfolk they had none, neither Erlend nor she—widespread as their kindred was. Munan Baardssön scarce counted any more. He stood condemned for unlawful dealings when he held the Wardenship of Ringerike; he sought too eagerly to get his many children on in the world—four he had had in wedlock and five outside it. And 'twas said he had fallen away much since Lady Katrin's death. Inge of Ryfylke, Julitta and her husband, Ragnfrid, who was married in Sweden, knew but little of Erlend—these were the other children left by Lady Aashild. Between the Hestnes folk and Erlend there had been no friendship since Sir Baard Peterssön died; Tormod of Raasvold was in his second childhood; his and Lady Gunna's children were dead, and their grandchildren still in their nonage.

She herself had no other kin on her father's side in Norway than Ketil Aasmundssön of Skog, and Sigurd Kyrning, who was wedded to Aasmund's eldest daughter. The other daughter was a widow, and the third a nun. The men of Sundbu seemed to be all four mixed in the case.

The sick monk in the Preachers' Cloister was Erlend's only near kinsman. And the man who stood nearest to her in the world was Simon Darre, since he was wed with her only sister.

Munan awoke, whimpering. Kristin turned in her bed and laid the child to her breast on the other side. She could not take him with her to Nidaros, uncertain as all things were. Maybe this would be the last time this little one would drink from his own mother's breast. Maybe this would be the last time in this world that she should lie thus, holding a little child close to her, so blissfully, so blessedly. If Erlend's life were forfeit——! Blessed Mary, Mother of God, had she on any day or in any hour murmured by reason of the children God had granted her——? Would this be the last kiss she should ever have from such a little milky mouth as this——?

5

KRISTIN' went to the palace the next evening as soon as she was come into the city. Where in all this great mansion have they put Erlend? she thought, as she looked round at the many stone houses. It seemed to her she thought more of how Erlend might be faring, than of what she might have to learn. But she was told, on asking, that the Treasurer had left the town.

Her eyes smarted after the long boat-journey in the glittering sunlight, and her breasts, overfilled with milk, troubled her. When the serving-folk who lay in the room were gone to sleep, she got up and walked the floor all through the night.

Next day she sent Haldor, her own man, to the palace.—He came home, terrified and unhappy—Ulf Haldorssön, his father's brother, had been taken prisoner on the fjord, trying to come over to the cloister at Holm. The Treasurer was not yet come back.

This tidings put Kristin, too, in the greatest fear. Ulf had not dwelt at Husaby this last year, but had been working as one of the Warden's sheriffs, for the most part at Skjoldvirkstad, of which he now owned the greatest part. What kind of cause could this be, in which so many men were entangled? She could no longer keep at bay the worst fears, sick and worn with waking as she was now.

On the morning of the third day Sir Baard was still not come home. And a message that Kristin had tried to send to her husband did not reach him. She thought of seeking out Gunnulf in the cloister, but felt she could not. She walked and walked up and down the hall at home, with half-shut burning eyes. Sometimes 'twas as though she were walking half in her sleep; but as soon as she lay down, the fear and the pains came over her again so strongly that she was forced to rise again, broad awake, and walk, so as to endure them.

Just after nones Gunnulf Nikulaussön came in to her. Kristin went swiftly to meet the monk.

"Have you seen Erlend—Gunnulf, what is it they charge against him——?"

"There are heavy tidings, Kristin. No, they will not let any come near Erlend—least of all, us cloister-folk. They believe that Abbot Olav has been privy to his plans. 'Tis true he borrowed money there,

but the Brothers all swear that they knew naught of what he meant to do with it, when they put the Convent's seal to the deed. And the Abbot will give no account of his doings——"

"Aye. But what is it?—Is it the Duchess that has lured Erlend on to this——?"

Gunnulf answered:

"It seems rather as though they had to press her hard before she would join in their plans. The letter that—someone—has seen a draft of, which Erlend and his friends sent her last spring, they can scarce lay hands on, I trow, except they can force the lady to give it up to them. And they have found no draft. But by the answering letter and Sir Aage Laurissen's letter, which they took from Borgar Trondssön at Veöy, it seems sure enough that she has had such a writing from Erlend and the men who had bound them to stand by him in this plot. It seems to be clear that she was long afraid to send Prince Haakon to Norway—but that they urged upon her that, whatever the outcome of the matter might be, 'twas not possible that King Magnus should harm the child, his own brother. Should Haakon Knutssön not win the crown of Norway, he would not be much worse off than before—but these men were willing to venture their lives and all their goods to set him upon the throne."

For a long time Kristin sat quite still.

"I understand. These are greater matters than those that were between Sir Erling or the Haftorssöns and the King?"

"Aye," said Gunnulf in a low voice. "'Twas to be given out that Haftor Graut and Erlend sailed for Björgvin. But it was Kalundborg they were bound for, and they were to bring Prince Haakon back with them to Norway, while King Magnus was yet abroad about his wooing——"

A little after, the monk said, still low:

"'Tis more than—'tis wellnigh a hundred years now since any Norwegian noble has dared the like of this; tried to overthrow him who was King by inheritance, and set up a rival King——"

Kristin sat gazing before her. Gunnulf could not see her face.

"Aye," she said in a while, thoughtfully. "The last men who ventured on that game were your forbears and Erlend's—and that time, too, my dead and gone kinsmen of the Gjesling house stood by King Skule."

She met Gunnulf's questioning look, and burst out, hotly and vehemently:

"I am but a simple woman, Gunnulf—little heed did I pay when

my husband spoke with other men of such things—and unwilling was I to listen when he would have spoken with me of them—God help me, such weighty matters were beyond my understanding. But, simple woman as I am, unskilled in aught but my household work and the nurture of my children—even I know that right and justice had too far to travel before any man's cause could win through to the King and back again whence it sprung; and I have understood, too, that the common folk of this land have less prosperity and harder times now than when I was a child and King Haakon of blessed memory was our overlord. My husband—" she breathed quickly and tremulously once or twice—"my husband, I see it now, had taken up a cause so great that none of the other chiefs of this land dared set a hand to it——"

"That had he." The monk clenched his hands tightly together; his voice sank to a whisper. "So great a cause that many will deem it an ill thing that he should himself have brought about its downfall—and in such wise——"

Kristin cried out and started up. The sudden violent motion made the pain in her breast and arms so sharp that her whole body was bathed in sweat. Wildly and feverishly she turned on the monk and cried loudly:

"'Twas not Erlend did it—it was doomed so to be—it was his evil chance——"

She flung herself forward on her knees, with her hands pressed against the bench, and lifted her flushed, despairing visage toward the monk:

"You and I, Gunnulf—you, his brother, and I, his wife for thirteen years—we should not throw blame on Erlend, now he is a poor prisoner, in peril of his life maybe——"

Gunnulf's face quivered. He looked down at the kneeling woman.

"God requite it to you, Kristin, that you can take this matter so." Again he wrung his wasted hands together. "God—God grant Erlend life, and the power to repay you for your faithfulness. God turn away this evil from you and from your children, Kristin——"

"Speak not so!" She drew herself upright on her knees and looked up into the man's face. "No good has come of it, Gunnulf, when you have stepped in, in Erlend's affairs and mine. None has judged him so hardly as you—his brother and God's servant!"

"Never has it been my will to judge Erlend more harshly than—than I must." His white face had grown yet whiter. "None upon earth have I held so dear as my brother. It may well be, therefore—that it wrung my soul as it had been my own sin that I must myself atone

for, when Erlend offended against you. And then there is Husaby—'twas for Erlend alone to carry onward the race that is mine as well as his. The greatest part of my heritage I gave into his hands. Your sons are the men that are nearest to me in blood——"

"Erlend has *not* offended against me! I was no better than he! Why speak you so to me, Gunnulf?—you have never been my confessor. Sira Eiliv did not blame my husband to me—he corrected *me* for my sins when I laid bare my troubles to him. He was a better priest than you—and he it is that God has set over me, that I should hearken to him—and he has never said that I suffered wrong. I will hearken to him!"

Gunnulf had risen when she stood up. He muttered, his face pale and troubled:

"You speak the truth. 'Tis Sira Eiliv you must hearken to——"

He turned to go, but she caught his hand impetuously:

"Nay, go not from me so! I remember, Gunnulf—I remember when I was your guest here in this house—'twas yours then; and you were good to me. I mind the first time I met you—I was plunged in fear and pain—I remember you spoke to me in Erlend's excuse—you could not know—— You prayed and prayed for my life and my child's life. I know that you wished us well, you held Erlend dear——

"Oh, speak not hardly of Erlend, Gunnulf—which of us is clean before God? My father grew to be fond of him; our children love their father. Remember, he found me weak and easy to lure astray, and he set me in a good and honourable place.—Oh, aye, 'tis fair at Husaby—the last evening before I left home it was so fair, the sunset that evening was so beautiful. We have lived many a good day there together, Erlend and I.—However it may go, however it may go, yet is he my husband, my husband whom I love——"

"Kristin—trust not to the sunset glow and to the—love—you remember now that you fear for his life.

"——I remember a thing when I was young—a subdeacon only. Gudbjörg, that was after wedded with Alf of Uvaasen, was a servant at Siheim then; she was charged with stealing a golden ring. It came out that she was guiltless; but the shame and fear had so shaken her soul that the enemy won power over her; she went down to the lake and would have thrown herself in. And she often bore witness for us afterward that, as she went in, the world seemed to her so red and golden and fair, and the water shone bright and felt warm and comforting, but when she stood in it to her middle she was moved to name

Jesu name and cross herself—and then did the whole world grow grey, and the waters cold, and she saw whither she had been bound——"

"Then will I not name it," Kristin spoke softly—she stood stiffly upright—"if I could believe that then I would be tempted to forsake my lord in his need. But methinks 'twould not be Christ's name, but rather the enemy's, that could do the like——"

"I meant not that; I meant—God strengthen you, Kristin, to bear your husband's faults with a loving spirit——"

"You see that I do so," said the wife in the same tone.

Gunnulf turned from her, white and trembling. He passed his hand over his face:

"I will go home. I can more easily—at home I can more easily gather my thoughts—that I may do all that lies in my power for Erlend and you. God—God and all holy men preserve my brother's life and freedom. Oh, Kristin—never believe that my brother is not dear to me——"

But after he was gone, Kristin deemed that all things were grown worse. She would not have the serving-folk in with her, but walked and walked, wringing her hands and moaning softly. The evening had grown late, when there came a noise of people riding into the court-yard. A moment after, the door was opened and a tall, stout man in a riding-cloak, first dimly seen in the twilight, came quickly toward her with jingling spurs and trailing sword. When she knew him for Simon Andressön, she burst out into loud sobbing and ran toward him with outstretched arms, but she cried out in pain when he drew her to him.

Simon loosed his hold. She stood with her hands on his shoulders and her forehead leaned upon his breast, sobbing helplessly. He put his arm lightly around her:

"In God's name, Kristin!"—It seemed as though there was rescue in the very tones of his dry, warm voice, in the living smell of man that came from him—mixed of sweat, dust of the high road, horses and leather garments. "In God's name—'tis all too soon to lose hope and courage yet.—There must be some way out, be sure——"

In a little she had grown calm enough to beg him for pardon. She was quite sick and wretched, she said, for she had had to take her youngest child from the breast so suddenly.

Simon learned how she had fared these three days and nights. He called her serving-maid and asked angrily if there was not a single woman in the house that had wit enough to know what ailed their

mistress. But the woman was a raw young maid, and the bailiff of Erlend's town-house was a widower with two unmarried daughters. Simon sent a man out into the town to fetch a leech-woman, and bade Kristin go to bed. When she had grown a little easier, he would come in and speak with her.

While they waited for the leech-woman, he and his man were served with food in the hall; and over his meal he talked with her as she undressed in the closet. Yes, he had ridden north as soon as he had heard what had befallen at Sundbu—he had come hither, and Ramborg gone thither to be with Ivar's and Borgar's wives. Ivar they had taken to Mjös Castle, but Haavard they had left at large, yet had he been made to promise not to leave the parish. 'Twas said that Borgar and Guttorm had been lucky enough to get clear away—Jon of Laugarbru had ridden out to Raumsdal for tidings and was to send word hither. Simon had been at Husaby at midday, but had not tarried long. All was well with the boys, but Naakkve and Björgulf had begged and begged him to take them with him.

Kristin had gotten back her courage and calm when, late in the evening, Simon sat by her on the bed's edge. She lay, in the grateful weariness that comes after racking pains are gone, and looked at her brother-in-law's heavy sunburned face and small strong eyes. It stayed and comforted her that he had come. Simon grew most grave, indeed, when he heard more fully how the matter stood, but yet he spoke hearteningly.

Kristin lay looking at the elkskin belt round his bulky waist. The great flat buckle of copper thinly coated with silver, without other adornment than a pierced A and M, betokening Ave Maria; the long dagger with the silver-gilt mountings and great rock-crystals set in the hilt; the poor little table-knife with the handle of cracked horn mended with brass bands—all this she had known ever since she was a child as part of her father's everyday gear. She remembered when Simon had gotten these things—just before her father died, he had been minded to give Simon his gilded best belt, and silver to make plates enough to lengthen it to fit his son-in-law. But Simon begged he might be given this one—and when Lavrans said he was cheating himself, Simon would have it that the dagger, at least, was a costly piece. "Aye, and then the knife," said Ragnfrid with a little smile; and then the men laughed and said: "Aye, the knife, to be sure." For about this knife her father and mother had had so much debate. It was a daily and hourly vexation to Ragnfrid to see such an ugly, paltry thing at her husband's belt. But Lavrans swore she

should never gain her end and part him from it. "Never have I drawn it against you, Ragnfrid; and 'tis as fine a knife as any in Norway's land to cut butter with—when 'tis hot enough."

She begged Simon to let her see the knife, and lay awhile with it in her hands.

"I could wish that I owned this knife," she said softly and beseechingly.

"Aye—that I can well believe—glad am I that I own it—I would not sell it for twenty marks." He caught her wrists laughingly, and took the knife back from her. Simon's small plump hands were always so good to touch, so warm and dry.

A little after, he bade her good night, took the candle, and went into the hall. She heard him kneel before the crucifix in there, stand up again, throw off his boots on the floor, then in a little lie heavily down on the bed by the north wall. Then Kristin sank into a fathomless, sweet sleep.

She did not wake till far on in the next day. Simon Andressön had gone out long before, and the house-folk had orders to pray her from him that she stay quietly at home in the house.

It was wellnigh the time of nones before he came back; but he said at once:

"I bear you greetings from Erlend, Kristin—I came to speech with him."

He saw how young her face grew, how soft and anxiously tender. So he took her hand in his while he told his story. It was not much that he and Erlend had been able to say to each other, for the man that had brought Simon to the prisoner had stayed by them all the time. Olav Lagmand had gotten Simon leave for this visit, for the sake of the kinship that had been between them while Halfrid lived.—Erlend sent loving greeting to her and the children; he had asked much about them all, but most of all about Gaute. Simon thought that in some days Kristin might get leave to see her husband. Erlend had seemed calm and in good heart.

"Had I gone out with you to-day, I might have seen him, too," said the wife softly.

Simon said: no; he had got in because he came alone. "In many a wise, Kristin, it may be easier for you to make way when a man goes ahead of you."

Erlend was kept in a room in the East Tower, out toward the river—

one of the gentlefolks' rooms, though a small one. Ulf, they said, was in the dungeon; Haftor in another cell.

Warily feeling his way, to make sure how much she could bear, Simon told her what he had heard in the town. When he saw that she already understood the case to the full, he hid not from her that he, too, thought it a perilous matter. But all those he had talked to said that 'twas not possible Erlend could have dared to plan such an undertaking, and to carry it forward as far as he had done, except he was sure that he had a great part of the knights and the nobles at his back. And since the malcontent great folk were so strong in numbers, it was not like that the King would dare to deal too hardly with their leader; but rather that he must let Erlend make his peace with him in some fashion.

Kristin asked in a low voice:

"Where does Erling Vidkunssön stand in this matter?"

"*That* I can see many a man would give something to know," said Simon.

Though he said it not to Kristin, and had not said it to the men with whom he had talked of this, it seemed to him little likely that Erlend should have at his back any powerful band of men who had bound themselves to risk life and goods in such a perilous affair—had it been so, they would scarce have chosen him their chief, for that Erlend was rash and unstable all his fellows must know well. It was true that he was kinsman to Lady Ingebjörg and the young pretender; he had enjoyed much power and esteem in these latter years, he was not quite so unpractised in war as were most men of an age with him—was known as one that his men liked and followed—and though he had so often borne him witlessly, yet could he, when he would, speak well and to the point, so that it might well be thought that he had now at long last learnt prudence from his mischances. Simon thought 'twas most like there were some who had known of Erlend's undertaking and had pushed him forward; but he could scarce believe that they had bound them so strongly that they could not draw back now and leave Erlend to bear the brunt alone.

Simon deemed he had seen that Erlend himself looked for naught else, and that his mind seemed made up to having to pay dearly for his desperate venture. "When kine lie mired, 'tis for the owners to hang on to their tails," he said, laughing a little. But, to be sure, Erlend had not been able to say much, with a third man listening.

Simon marvelled that this meeting with his brother-in-law had

moved him so much. But the narrow little turret-chamber, where Erlend had prayed him to take a seat on the bed—it went from wall to wall and filled half the room—Erlend's straight, slender form, as he stood by the little slit in the wall whence the light came—Erlend quite unafraid, clear-eyed, untroubled by either fear or hope—he was a fresh, cool, manful fellow, now all the clogging cobwebs of love-dalliance and foolery with women had been blown from off him. True, it was women and the commerce of love that had brought him hither, with all his daring plans that were ended ere yet he had brought them out into the light. But on that Erlend seemed not to think. He stood there like a man who had dared a desperate throw, had lost it, and knew how to suffer defeat well and manfully.

And his wondering and joyous thankfulness when he saw his brother-in-law sat well on him. Simon had said, when he saw it:

"Mind you not, kinsman, that night we watched together by our father-in-law? We gave one another our hands, and Lavrans laid his hand on ours—and we promised him and each other that we would stand together like brothers all our days."

"Aye." Erlend's face lit up with a smile. "Aye, and I trow Lavrans thought not that you would ever need *my* help."

"Nay," said Simon, unmoved, "'tis most like he deemed you, as you were placed, might well prove a stay to me, and not that you were like to need help from me."

Erlend smiled again:

"Lavrans was a wise man, Simon. And, strange as it may sound —I know that he liked me well."

Simon thought: aye, strange it was, God knew—yet even he himself—despite of all he knew of Erlend, and of all the other had done to him—even he could not help now feeling somewhat of a brother's tenderness toward Kristin's husband. Then Erlend asked of her.

Simon told him of how he had found her, sick and full of fear for her husband. Olav Hermanssön had promised to do his best to have her let in to see him, as soon as Sir Baard came home.

"Not before she is well!" said Erlend quickly. A strange flush, like a young girl's, passed over his brown unshaven face. "'Tis the one thing I dread, Simon—that I should not have strength to bear it well when I see her."

But in a little he said, as calmly as before:

"I know that you will stand by her faithfully, if she should be

left a widow this year. Penniless they will not be, she and the children, having her heritage from Lavrans. And she will have you near by, should she dwell at Jörundgaard."

The day after the Nativity of Mary,* the High Steward, Sir Ivar Ogmundssön, came to Nidaros. Twelve of the King's sworn liegemen from north of Dovre were named now as a Court to try Erlend Nikulaussön's cause. Sir Finn Ogmundssön, the High Steward's brother, had been chosen to set forth the charge against him.

Some time before this, in the summer, Haftor Olavssön of Godöy had slain himself with the little knife that each prisoner had been allowed to keep to cut his food with. Folk said that prison had so told on Haftor that he had not been in his right mind. Erlend said to Simon, when he heard of it, that now he need have no fear of Haftor's tongue. But yet he was much moved.

As time went on, it happened now and then that the guards would make themselves an errand without when Simon or Kristin was with Erlend. Both of these two saw—and spoke of it to each other—that Erlend's first and last thought was to come through this business without the names of those with him in the plot being discovered. To Simon one day he said so straight out. He had promised all who had joined in his counsels that he would hold the rope so that, if it came to the worst, the blow should fall on his hands only, "and never yet have I betrayed any that put their trust in me." Simon looked at the man—Erlend's eyes were blue and clear; 'twas plain that he said this of himself in all good faith.

Nor had the King's agents yet been able to track down any other who had taken part in Erlend's treason, save the brothers Greip and Torvard Toressöns of Möre; and these would not confess that they had known the intent of Erlend's plan to be aught else than that he and other men had moved the Duchess to let Prince Haakon Knutssön be brought up in Norway. Afterward it was meant that the chiefs should make prayer to King Magnus that 'twould be for the good of both his kingdoms if he gave his half-brother the name of King in Norway.

Borgar and Guttorm Trondssön had been lucky enough to escape from the palace at Veöy—none could say how, but folk guessed that Borgar had gotten help from some woman—he was a comely youth and something of a light liver. Ivar was still in prison in Mjös

* 8th September.

Castle; young Haavard his brothers seemed to have kept outside their counsels.

While the meeting of King's-men sat in the castle, the Archbishop held a concilium in his palace. Simon was a man with many friends and acquaintances; he could thus tell Kristin what was going forward. All deemed it likely that Erlend would be outlawed and banished and his lands and goods be forfeit to the King. Erlend, too, said 'twas like it would be so; he was in good heart—he meant to seek refuge in Denmark. As things stood in that land, the road to advancement was ever open to a man of mettle and skill in arms, and Lady Ingebjörg would surely welcome his wife as her kinswoman and keep her with her in all seemly honour. Simon would have to take the children, save the two eldest sons, whom Erlend was minded to have with him in Denmark.

Kristin had not been outside the city for a day in all this time, and had not seen her children, save Naakkve and Björgulf; they had come riding into the court-yard one evening alone. Their mother kept them with her for some days; but then she sent them to Raasvold, where Lady Gunna had taken the little ones to be with her.

Erlend wished it should be so. And Kristin was afraid of the thoughts that might arise in her if she were to see her sons about her, listen to their questions, and try to make things clear to them. She strove to thrust away from her all thoughts of her wedded years at Husaby. So rich had been those years that they seemed to her now to have been one great calm—even as there seems a sort of calm on a billowy sea when one stands high enough above it on a great cliff. The waves that chase each other seem everlasting and unchanging—even so had life billowed through her soul in those spacious years.

Now was it with her again as in her youth, when she had pitted her will to win Erlend against all things and all men. Now again was her life but a waiting from hour to hour, between the hours when she saw her husband, sat by his side on the bed in the turret-chamber of the castle, talked with him calmly and evenly—till by some chance they would be left alone for a moment, and would fall into each other's arms, with endless passionate kisses and wild embraces.

At other times she sat in Christ's Church, hours at a time. She kneeled, gazing up at St. Olav's golden shrine behind the grated lattice of the choir. Lord, I am his wife. Lord, I held fast to him when I was his in sin and unrighteousness. Through God's mercy were we two, all unworthy, joined together in holy wedlock. Seared

with the brands of sin, weighed down with sin's burden, we came together to the threshold of God's house, and together received the body of our Redeemer from the priest's hands. Should I now murmur if God puts my faithfulness to the proof? Should I think of aught else than that I am his wife and he is my husband as long as we both live——?

The Thursday before Michælmas, the meeting of the King's-men's court was held and judgment given on Erlend Nikulaussön of Husaby. He was found guilty of having plotted to despoil King Magnus of land and lieges by treachery, to raise revolt against the King within the land, and to lead into Norway forces hired from without. After having made search into all such cases in former times, the judges decreed that Erlend Nikulaussön had forfeited his life and all his goods into King Magnus' hands.

Arne Gjavvaldssön came down to Simon Darre and Kristin Lavransdatter in the Nikulaus town-house. He had been at the meeting.

Erlend had not tried to deny what he had done. Clearly and firmly he had acknowledged his purpose, by these measures to force King Magnus to give his young half-brother, Prince Haakon Knutssön Porse, the kingship of Norway. Arne had deemed that Erlend spoke exceeding well. He had pointed to the great hardships and troubles suffered by the people of the land, by reason that the King, in these later years, had scarce set foot on Norwegian soil, and had ever shown unwillingness to appoint Stadtholders who could do justice and wield the kingly powers. By reason of the King's undertakings in Skaane, and of the wastefulness and the unwisdom in money matters that were shown by the men he most hearkened to, the folk suffered oppression and impoverishment, and could never feel safe from new demands for help and newfangled taxes. Since the Norwegian knights and esquires bearing arms had far fewer rights and liberties than the Swedish knighthood, it was hard for them to contend with the Swedes on equal terms, and it was but reason and nature that a man like Sir Magnus Eirikssön, young and unskilled in affairs, should hearken more to his Swedish lords and love them more, since they had greater riches and therefore more power to support him with well-armed and well-trained warriors.

He and his confederate friends had deemed they had such sure knowledge of the minds of the greatest part of the folk, both nobles, peasants and townsmen, in the north and west of Norway, that they had doubted not at all they would find full following there, if they could

bring forward a Prince as nearly akin to their dear lord, King Haakon of blessed memory, as he they had now. He had looked that then the folk of the land would agree together that we should move King Magnus to let his brother mount the throne here; while Prince Haakon should swear to maintain peace and brotherhood with King Magnus, to guard the realm of Norway in accordance with the ancient boundaries, to uphold the rights of God's Church, the laws and customs of the land as handed down from of old, and the rights and liberties of both country folk and townsmen; and to put a stop to foreigners' forcing their way into the kingdom. This plan it had been his and his friends' intent to put before King Magnus in friendly wise. Yet had it ever from of old been the right of the Norwegian farmers and chieftains to set aside a King who tried to rule unlawfully.

Of Ulf Saksessön's doings in England and Scotland, he said that Ulf's intent was but to win favour there for Prince Haakon, if so be God would grant that he became our lord. With him in this undertaking there had been no Norseman, saving Haftor Olavssön of Godöy (to whose soul God be merciful), his kinsmen Trond Gjesling's three sons of Sundbu, and Greip and Torvard Toressöns of the Hatteberg kindred.

Erlend's words had moved his hearers strongly, said Arne Gjavvaldssön. But at the end, when he spoke of the support they had looked for from the Church's men, he had recalled those old rumours of the time when King Magnus was not yet grown up, and that, Arne deemed, had been unwise. The Archbishop's officer had taken him sharply to task—Archbishop Paal Baardssön, as they knew, both while he was Chancellor and since, bore great love toward King Magnus, by reason of the King's godly turn of mind; and folk were fain now to forget that such rumours had ever been spread about their King; besides, he was even now about to wed a lady, the Count's daughter of Namur—had there ever been any truth in the matter, it must be deemed that now Magnus Eirikssön had altogether turned him from all such things.

——Arne Gjavvaldssön had shown Simon Andressön the greatest friendliness while Simon had been in Nidaros. It was Arne, too, who now reminded Simon that it must be open to Erlend to appeal from this judgment, as unlawfully come to. According to the words of the law, the charge against Erlend should have been brought forward by one of his peers; but Sir Finn of Hestbö was a knight, and Erlend but an esquire. It might well be, thought Arne, that a new court would find that a harder punishment than outlawry could not be awarded Erlend.

As for what Erlend had set forth, concerning the kind of kingly rule he deemed this land would best be served with, it had sounded fair and fine, truly. And all men knew where the man was to be found who would have been glad enough to take the helm and steer this course while the new King was in his nonage—Arne scratched the grey stubble on his chin, and glanced across at Simon.

"None has heard from him, or of him, this summer?" asked Simon in a low voice.

"No. He says, I did hear, that he is out of favour with the King and stands outside all such matters. 'Tis many a long day since he has been content to sit so long at home and listen to Lady Elin's talk. His daughters are as fair and as dull as their mother, folks say."

Erlend had heard the doom of the court with steadfast calm, and he had saluted the members of the court as mannerly, freely and fairly when he was led out as when he had come in. He was calm and cheerful when Kristin and Simon were granted speech with him next day. Arne Gjavvaldssön was with them, and Erlend said that he would follow Arne's counsel.

"Never could I bring Kristin here to come with me to Denmark in former days," he said, putting an arm about his wife's waist. "And I had ever such a mind to go forth into the world with her."

A kind of quiver passed over his face, and of a sudden he kissed her pale cheek vehemently, heedless of the two lookers-on.

Simon Andressön rode out to Husaby to take order for the moving of Kristin's goods to Jörundgaard. He counselled her to send the children, too, to Gudbrandsdal, at the same time. Kristin said:

"My sons shall not depart from their father's house, till they are driven out."

"I would not wait for that, if I were in your place," said Simon. "They are so young, they can scarce rightly understand this matter. 'Twere better you let them leave Husaby believing that they are going but to visit their mother's sister, and to see to their mother's heritage in the Dale."

Erlend held with Simon in this. But the upshot was that only Ivar and Skule went south with their aunt's husband. Kristin could not send the two little ones so far away from her. When Lavrans and Munan were brought to her in the town-house, and she saw that her youngest son knew her not again, she quite broke down. Simon had

not seen her shed a tear since the first evening he came to Nidaros; but now she wept and wept over Munan as he sprawled and struggled, close pressed in his mother's arms, striving to come to his foster-mother; and she wept over young Lavrans, who crept up into her lap and caught her round the neck, weeping because she wept. So she kept the two with her, and Gaute, too—he was unwilling to go with Simon, and it seemed to her unwise to let this child, who was bearing a load all too heavy for his years, out of her sight.

Sira Eiliv had brought the children to the city. He had prayed the Archbishop to let him leave his church awhile and visit his brother at Tautra; and this was readily granted to Erlend Nikulaussön's house priest. And since it seemed to him that Kristin could scarce take care of so many children while staying alone in the city, he proffered to take Naakkve and Björgulf out with him to the cloister.

The last night before the priest and the boys were to set forth—Simon had left already with the twins—Kristin made confession to the holy and pure-hearted man who had been her spiritual father all these years. They sat together many hours, and Sira Eiliv was instant with her to be humble and obedient toward God, and patient, faithful and loving toward her wedded husband. She knelt by the bench where he sat; then Sira Eiliv rose up and knelt by her side, still bearing the red stole, the token of the yoke of Christ's love, and prayed long and fervently without words. But she knew that he prayed for the father and mother and the children and all the household, whose soul's health he had so faithfully striven to further all these years.

The day after, she stood on the shore at Bratören and watched the lay brothers from Tautra setting sail on the boat that was to bear away the priest and her two eldest sons. On the way home she went into the Minorites' Church, and tarried there till she deemed she was strong enough to venture back to her own house. And in the evening, when the two little ones were gone to sleep, she sat with her spinning and told Gaute stories, till it was bedtime for him too.

6

ERLEND was held prisoner in the castle till nigh upon Clement's Mass.* Then there came word and letters ordering that he should be taken south under safe-conduct,† to be brought before King Magnus. The King purposed to hold the Yule-tide feast at Baagahus ‡ that year.

Kristin was thrown into deadly fear. With unspeakable struggles she had used herself to keep calm, with Erlend a prisoner under doom of death. Now was he to be taken far away to a doubtful fate; folk said all manner of things about the King, and in the band of men who were about him Erlend had no friends. Ivar Ogmundssön, who now was Governor of the castle at Baaghus, had spoken of Erlend's treason in the harshest words. And 'twas said he had been set against Erlend the more by being told of some malapert speech of Erlend's about him in former days.

But Erlend was glad of the tidings. Kristin saw, indeed, that he took not the parting now at hand lightly. But this long imprisonment had begun to wear so upon him that he grasped eagerly at the thought of the long sea journey, and seemed careless wellnigh of all else.

In three days all was ready, and Erlend set sail in Sir Finn's ship. —Simon had promised to come back to Nidaros before Advent, when he had cast about him a little and ordered his affairs at home; but if before that there were any new tidings, he had prayed Kristin to send him word, and he would come at once. Now it came to her that she would journey south to him, and from thence would she go on to where the King was, and would fall at his feet and pray for mercy for her husband—gladly would she offer all her possessions to redeem his life.

Erlend had sold or pledged his mansion in Nidaros to divers people; the Nidarholm cloister owned the hall-house now, but Abbot Olav had written lovingly to Kristin, praying her to use it as long as she had need. She was there alone with one serving-maid, Ulf Haldorssön

* 23rd November.
† Note 16.
‡ Note 17.

(who had been set free, since they had not enough proof against him), and his nephew Haldor, Kristin's own man.

She took counsel with Ulf, and at first he showed himself somewhat doubtful—he deemed it would be too hard a journey for her across the Dovrefjeld; much snow had fallen in the hills already. But when he saw the woman's anguish of soul, he turned round and counselled that she should go. Lady Gunna took the two little children out to Raasvold; but Gaute would not be parted from his mother, and she felt, too, that she dared not well let the boy stay north of Dovre and out of her sight.

They met such hard weather when they came south on to the high mountains, that by Ulf's counsel they borrowed ski at Drivstuen and left their horses behind there, lest they should be forced to pass the next night in the open. Kristin had not had ski on her feet since she was a little maid, and it was hard for her to make headway on them, though the men upheld and helped her to the utmost. They could come no farther that day than midway in the hills between Drivstuen and Hjerdkinn; and when it grew dark, they had to seek shelter in a birch-wood and dig themselves down into the snow. At Toftar they were able to hire horses again; here they plunged into mists, and when they came a little down into the Dale, they found rainy weather. When, some hours after dark had fallen, they rode into the Formo court-yard, the wind howled about the house-corners, the river roared, and a rushing, soughing sound came from the hill-side woods. The court-yard was like a swamp, and deadened the sound of the horses' hoofs—in the Saturday evening holiday from work there was no sign of life on the great manor, and neither the folk nor the dogs seemed to be ware of their coming.

Ulf thundered on the door of the hall-house with his spear; a serving-man came and opened. A moment after, Simon himself stood in the outer-room door, broad and dark against the light behind, with a child on his arm; he drove the barking dogs behind him. He gave a cry when he saw his wife's sister, set down the child, and drew her and Gaute in, taking off their soaking outer garments himself.

It was goodly and warm in the hall, but the air was very thick, for it was a fire-place room with flat ceiling under the upper hall. And 'twas full of folk, and children and dogs seemed swarming out of every corner. Then Kristin made out her two little sons' faces, red, warm and joyous, in behind the table where a candle stood burning. They came forward now and greeted their mother and brother a little shyly. Kris-

tin saw that she had broken in here into the midst of these good folks' comfort and cheer. For the rest, the whole room was in a litter, and at each step she took she trod on crunching nutshells—they were scattered all over the floor.

Simon sent the serving-men and women out on divers errands, and the most part of the dogs and children followed them, as well as the grown folks—these were neighbours with their following.—While he questioned and listened to her, he fastened up his shirt and coat, which had stood open, showing his naked, hairy chest. The children had made him in this plight, he said in excuse. He was indeed in sad disarray: his belt was twisted awry, his hands and clothes dirty, his face sooty, and his hair full of dust and straw.

Soon after came two serving-women and brought Kristin and Gaute over to Ramborg's ladies' hall. A fire had been lit there, and busy serving-maids lighted candles, made up the bed, and helped her and the boy into dry clothes, while others set the board with meat and drink. A half-grown maid with silk-bound plaits brought Kristin a foaming mug of ale. The girl was Simon's eldest daughter, Arngjerd.

Then he himself came in; he had made himself trim and was more as Kristin was used to see him—well and richly clad. He led his little daughter by the hand, and Ivar and Skule came with him.

Kristin asked after her sister, and Simon said Ramborg had gone with the ladies from Sundbu down to Ringheim; Jostein had come to fetch his daughter Helga, and he had wished to take Dagny and Ramborg with him too; he was a cheerful kindly old man, and he had promised to take the best care of the three young wives. So maybe Ramborg would stay there through the winter. She looked to have another child at St. Matthew's Mass or thereabout—and then Simon had thought that 'twas like he might have to be away from home this winter; so she would be better off with her young kinswomen. Oh, no—for the housekeeping here at Formo, it made no odds whether she were at home or away, laughed Simon—for he had never craved of a young child like Ramborg that she should wear herself out with the drudgery of a great household.

On hearing Kristin's plans, Simon said at once that he would go with her south. He had so many kinsfolk there, and so many old friends of his father's and his own, that he hoped he could be of more service to her there than in Trondheim. Whether it would be wise for her to seek the King herself, he could better judge when they came thither. He would be ready for the road in three or four days.

They went together to mass the next day, being Sunday, and afterward

went to see Sira Eirik at Romungaard. The priest was old now; he welcomed Kristin lovingly, and seemed most sorrowful at her mischance. Then they went round by Jörundgaard.

The houses were the same, and in the rooms were the same beds and benches and tables. This was now her own manor, and it seemed most like that 'twas here her sons would grow up, and that here she herself would one day lay her down and close her eyes forever. But never had she felt so clearly as in this hour that it was on her father and mother all the life of this home had rested. Whatever hidden troubles they might have had to struggle with, warmth and help, peace and safety had flowed out from them to all that lived about them.

Restless and heavy of heart as she was, it wearied her a little when Simon talked of his own affairs, his estates and the children. She saw herself that there was no reason in it; he was ready to help her with all his might; she saw that 'twas most good of him to be willing to leave his home at Yule-tide, and to be parted from his wife at a time like this—he surely was thinking much on whether he should soon have a son now—for he had only had the one child by Ramborg as yet, though they would soon have been wedded six years. She could not look that he should take her mischance and Erlend's so much to heart as quite to forget all joy in his own happy lot; but it was strange to go about with him here, and see him so joyful and warm and secure in his own home.

Unwittingly Kristin had thought that Ulvhild Simonsdatter would be like her own little sister, whom she had been named after—would be fair-haired and slender and clear-skinned. But Simon's little daughter was round and fat, with cheeks like apples and a mouth like a red berry, quick grey eyes like her father's in his youth, and with his goodly brown curling hair. Simon loved the bonny, lively child much, and was proud of her quick-witted prattle.

"Though yet this little girl is so ugly and loathly and ill-favoured," he said, putting his hands on each side of her chest and twirling her while he lifted her into the air, "I deem 'tis a changeling that the trolls up in the fell here have brought for her mother and me and put into the cradle, such a grim and grum little thing is it"; then he set her down suddenly, and hastily made the sign of the cross over her three times, as though frighted by his own rash words.

His base-born daughter, Arngjerd, was not fair, but she looked good and understanding, and her father took her about with him as often as 'twas possible. He was full of praises of her handiness.—

Kristin was made to look into Arngjerd's chest, and see all the things she had spun and woven and sewed already for her dowry.

"The day I lay the hand of this daughter of mine in a good true-hearted bridegroom's hand," said Simon, looking long after the girl, "will be one of the gladdest days I have known."

To save the cost and to get the journey over quickly, Kristin would not take with her any maid, nor any man other than Ulf Haldorssön. Fourteen days before Yule, then, she and he set forth from Formo, in company with Simon and his two stout young serving-men.

When they came to Oslo, Simon soon learnt that the King would not come to Norway—he was to hold the Yule-tide feast at Stockholm, it seemed. Erlend was in the castle at Akersnes; the Governor of the castle was away, so that in the meantime 'twas not possible for any of them to see the prisoner. But the Under-Treasurer, Olav Kyrning, promised to let Erlend know they were in the city. Olav showed much friendliness toward Simon and Kristin, for his brother was wedded to Ramborg Aasmundsdatter of Skog, so that he counted him a far-off kinsman of Lavrans' daughters.

Ketil of Skog came into the city and bade them out to Skog to drink Yule-tide with him; but Kristin would not keep the holy-days with feasting while things stood thus with Erlend. And Simon would not go alone, though she prayed him much to do so. Simon and Ketil knew somewhat of each other, but Kristin had seen her uncle's son but once since he was grown up.

Kristin and Simon took lodging in the same mansion where she had once been his parents' guest when they two were betrothed; but they dwelt in another house. There were two beds in the room; she slept in one, and Simon and Ulf in the other; the men lay in the stable.

On Christmas Eve, Kristin wished to go to the midnight mass in Nonneseter church—she said it was because the sisters sang so sweetly. So they all five went together. The night was clear starlight, mild and fair, and it had snowed a little in the evening, so that 'twas somewhat light. When the bells began ringing from the churches, folk streamed out of all the houses, and Simon had to lead Kristin by the hand. Now and then he stole a glance at her. She was grown greatly thinner this last autumn, but it was as though her tall, straight form had gotten back somewhat of the young maid's supple and tranquil grace. Over her pale face there was come again the look she had had in youth of calm and gentleness covering a deep and hidden, listening expectancy. She had taken on a strange ghostly likeness to

the young Kristin of that Yule-tide long ago.—Simon pressed her hand, and knew not that he had done so till he felt an answering pressure. He looked up—she smiled and nodded, and he understood that she had taken his handclasp as a warning to her to be brave—and now she was striving to show him that indeed she was brave.

Toward the end of the holy-days, Sir Munan came to her—he had only now heard she was in the city, he said. He greeted her heartily, likewise Simon Andressön and Ulf, whom he spoke to at every second word as "kinsman" and "dear friend." It might be hard for them to gain sight of Erlend, he said; he was most strictly guarded—*he* had not been able to win in to see his cousin. But Ulf said, with a laugh, when the knight was gone, that he deemed not Munan had pressed so exceeding hard to gain entrance—he was in such deadly fear of being tangled in the affair that he could scarcely bear to hear it named. Munan had grown exceeding old, exceeding bald, and wasted in flesh; the skin hung loose on his bulky frame. He dwelt out at Skogheim, and had with him one of his base-born daughters who was a widow. The father would gladly have been quit of her, for none of his other children, neither those born in wedlock nor the others, would come near him so long as this half-sister ruled his house; she was an overbearing, greedy and shrewish woman. But Munan dared not bid her begone.

At length, some time on in the new year, Olav Kyrning got leave for Erlend's wife and Simon to see him. And now again it fell to Simon's lot to bear the sorrowful wife company at these heart-breaking meetings. Much stricter watch was kept here than at Nidaros to see that Erlend spoke with none, except the Governor's folk were by.

Erlend was calm as before, but Simon saw that this waiting was beginning to wear upon the man. He made no complaint at any time, and said that he suffered no ill usage and that all was done for him that could be done; but he owned that he was much plagued with the cold—there was no fire-place in the cell. And 'twas not in his power to indulge himself overmuch in cleanliness—though, he laughed, had he not had the lice to fight with, like enough the time would have seemed yet longer out here.

Kristin, too, was calm—so calm that Simon waited in breathless fear for the day when she should break down altogether.

King Magnus made his royal progress in Sweden, and there seemed no likelihood that he would cross the boundary soon, or that any change in Erlend's state was at hand.

On the day of Gregory's Mass,* Kristin and Ulf Haldorssön had been at church at Nonneseter. When, on their way back, they had crossed the bridge over the Nonnebeck, she took not the way down toward her lodging, which lay near the Bishop's palace, but turned eastward toward the open place by Clement's Church, and into the narrow lanes between the church and the river.

The day was grey and thick—there had been soft weather for a time—and their footgear and the skirts of their cloaks quickly grew wet and heavy with the yellow clay of the riverside. They came out on the open lands toward the high bank of the river. Once their eyes met. Ulf laughed noiselessly, and his mouth twisted into a sort of grimace, but his eyes were sorrowful; Kristin smiled—a strange, sick smile.

Soon after, they stood at the edge of the high ground; there had once been a landslip in the clay bank here, and Fluga's house lay right under it, so close up against the dirty yellow slope, where a few black stunted weeds were growing, that the stench of the pigsty, which they looked down on, came rankly up to them—two fat sows were snuffling about in the black mud. The river-bank was but a narrow strip here; the muddy grey river-current, with the jostling ice-flakes on it, came right up to the tumble-down houses with their bleached grey shingle roofs.

Whilst they stood there, a man and a woman came up to the fencing of the sty and looked at the pigs—the man leaned over and began scratching one of the sows with the shaft-end of the silver-mounted light ax he was using as a staff. It was Munan Baardssön himself, and the woman was Brynhild. He looked up and was ware of them—he stood gaping up at them, and Kristin called out a cheerful greeting.

Sir Munan fell a-laughing loudly.

"Come down and have a drink of warm ale to keep out this filthy weather," he called up.

As they went down to the gate of the houses, Ulf told Kristin that Brynhild Jonsdatter kept neither lodging-house nor ale-tap any more. She had been in trouble many times, and at last had been threatened with flogging, but Munan had got her out and gone surety for her that she would altogether cease her unlawful traffickings. Her sons, too, had now got so far on in the world that for their sake their mother was forced to think of bettering her ill repute. After his wife's death, Munan Baardssön had taken up with her again, and he was often to be found in her house.

* 13th February.

He met them at the gate.

"Here we are—kinsfolk, all four of us, in a fashion," he snickered—he was a little in drink, but not much. "You are a good woman, Kristin Lavransdatter, pious but not proud.—Brynhild, too, is an honourable, worshipful woman now—and I was not yet a wedded man when I got the two sons I have by her—and they are much the best of all my children.—I have told you as much every day in all these years, Brynhild. Inge and Gudleik are dearest to me of all my children——"

Brynhild was comely still, but her skin was a pale yellow, and looked as if it must feel clammy, Kristin thought, as when one has stood all day over the fat-cauldrons. But her house was well kept, the food and drink that she put on the board were of the best, and the vessels fair and clean.

"Aye, I look in here when I have an errand in Oslo," said Munan. "You understand, the mother is fain to hear tidings of her sons. Inge writes to me from time to time, for he is a learned man, Inge; a Bishop's commissary must be so, you know—and I got him well wedded too, with Tora Bjarnesdatter of Grjote; think you many men have got such a wife for their bastard? So we sit here and talk about this, and Brynhild bears in the meat and ale to me, just as she used in days gone by, when she bore the keys of my house at Skogheim. 'Tis heavy work sitting out there now thinking of my wife that is gone.—So I ride in hither to find a little comfort—when it chances that Brynhild is in such mood that she grudges me not a little friendliness and comfort."

Ulf Haldorssön sat with his chin resting on his hand, looking at the lady of Husaby. Kristin sat and listened and answered quietly and gently and mannerly—as calm and courtly as if she had been a guest at one of the great folk's manors at home in Trondheim.

"Aye, you, Kristin Lavransdatter, you won a wife's name and came to honour," said Brynhild Fluga, "though you came willingly enough to meet Erlend in my loft. I have been called slut and loose woman all my days—my stepmother sold me into his hands, there—I bit and scratched, and left the marks of every one of my nails on his face before he had his will of me——"

"Must you speak of this ever?" grumbled Munan. "Be sure—I have told it you so often too—I had let you go in peace had you borne you like a human creature and bidden me spare you—but you flew at my face like a wildcat before I was well inside the door——"

Ulf Haldorssön laughed softly to himself.

"And I dealt well by you evermore thereafter," said Munan. "You had but to point to a thing and I gave it you—and our children—aye, for sure they are far better off and safer this day than Kristin's poor sons—God guard the poor young lads, so as Erlend has guided things for his children! Methinks that should mean more than the name of wife to a mother's heart—and you know that I wished often your birth had been such that I could have wedded you lawfully—no woman have I liked as well as you—though you were but seldom kind or good to me—and the wife I did get, God reward her——! I have set up an altar for my Katrin and myself out in our church at home, Kristin—I have thanked God and Our Lady every day for my wedded life—no man has had a better——" he whimpered and sniffed.

Soon after, Ulf Haldorssön said that they must go. He and Kristin exchanged not a word on the way back. But outside the door she reached out her hand to the man:

"Ulf—my kinsman and my friend."

"If it could help aught," he said in a low voice, "I would gladly go to the gallows in Erlend's stead—for his sake and for yours!"

That evening, a little before bedtime, Kristin sat alone in the hall with Simon. Of a sudden she began telling him where she had been that day. She told of the meeting at Brynhild Fluga's.

Simon sat on a stool not far from her. Leaning forward a little, with his arms resting on his thighs, and hands hanging down, he sat looking up at her with a strange, searching look in his small, sharp eyes. He spoke not a word, and not a muscle moved in his big, heavy face.

Then she let fall that she had told all to her father, and what he had said to her.

Simon sat as before, immovable. But in a while he said calmly:

" 'Twas the one thing I ever prayed of you, in all the years we have known each other—if I mind aright—that you would not—but if you could not keep silence to spare Lavrans, why——"

Kristin's whole body trembled:

"Aye! But—oh, Erlend, Erlend, Erlend——"

At the wild cry the man leapt up—Kristin had thrown herself forward, with her head between her arms, and was rocking her body from side to side, still calling on Erlend, between quivering, moaning sobs that seemed to tear their way out of her body.

"Kristin—in Jesu name!"

When he seized her upper arm and tried to stay her sobbing, she

flung herself on him with all the weight of her body, and caught him round the neck, while through her weeping she went on calling her husband's name.

"Kristin—be still——" He held her tight in his arms and saw that she marked it not—she was weeping so that she could not stand upright. Then he lifted her up in his arms—crushed her to him a moment, and then bore her over and laid her on the bed.

"Be still," he prayed her again, in a choking, almost a threatening voice—he laid his hands over her face, and she caught his wrists and arms and clung close to him.

"Simon—Simon—oh! he must be saved——"

"I do what I can, Kristin—but now you *shall* be still." He turned sharply, walked over to the door and out into the yard. He shouted, till the echoes rang back from the house-walls, for the maid whom Kristin had hired in Oslo. The girl came running, and Simon bade her go in to her mistress. In a moment she came out again—her mistress would be alone, she said affrightedly to Simon, who still stood on the same spot.

He nodded and walked over to the stables; and stayed there till Gunnar, his man, and Ulf Haldorssön came to give the beasts their evening feed. Simon talked with them awhile, and then went with Ulf back again to the hall.

Kristin saw not much of her brother-in-law the next day. But after nones, as she sat sewing on a garment she meant to take out to her husband, he came running in, said naught to her and looked not at her, but flung open the lid of his travelling-chest, filled his silver goblet with wine, and rushed out again. Kristin stood up and went after him. Before the door of the hall stood a strange man, still holding his horse—Simon drew a gold ring from his finger, dropped it into the goblet, and drank to the new-comer.

Kristin guessed what this must be, and cried out joyfully:

"You have a son, Simon!"

"Aye." He slapped the messenger on the shoulder, as the man, thanking him, put up the goblet and the ring safely inside his belt. Then Simon caught his wife's sister round the waist and whirled her round and round. He looked so glad that Kristin could not but put her two hands on his shoulders—and then he kissed her full on the mouth and laughed aloud.

"Then 'twill still be the Darre stock that will hold Formo when you are gone, Simon," she said joyfully.

"Aye, so will it be—if God will.—No, to-night I would go alone," he said, when Kristin asked if they should go together to evensong.

That night he said to Kristin that he had heard Sir Erling Vidkunssön was now at his manor of Aker near Tunsberg. And that morning he had hired him passage in a ship going down the fjord—he was minded to speak with Sir Erling of Erlend's case.

Kristin said not much in answer. They had barely touched on it before—had kept them from going much into the question—whether Sir Erling had been privy to Erlend's plans or not. Simon said now it would be well that he should ask Erling Vidkunssön's counsel as to Kristin's plan that Simon should go with her to Lavrans' powerful kinsfolk in Sweden to claim kinship and crave their help.

Then Kristin spoke her thought:

"But, now you have had these great tidings, brother-in-law, methinks that it were but reason you should put off this journey to Aker—and first ride up to Ringheim and see to Ramborg and your son."

He was forced to turn away, so overcome was he. He had waited so for this—whether Kristin would make any sign that she understood how he longed to see his son. But when he had mastered himself somewhat, he said, with some shyness in his voice:

"I have been thinking, Kristin—mayhap God will vouchsafe that the boy thrive and prosper the better if I can be patient and hold in check my longing to see him till I have managed to help you and Erlend a little forward in this matter."

The day after, he went out and bought rich and costly gifts for his wife and the boy—and for all the women, too, who had been with Ramborg when she bore the child. Kristin took out a fair silver spoon she had had from her mother's heritage—it was to be for Andres Simonssön—but to her sister she sent the heavy silver-gilt chain that Lavrans had given her in her childhood along with the reliquary cross. The cross she fastened now to the chain Erlend had given her as a betrothal-gift. The next day at midday Simon sailed.

In the evening the ship lay to under an island in the fjord. Simon stayed on board; he lay in a sleeping-bag of hide with some pieces of wadmal over him, looking up at the starry skies, where the constellations seemed to climb and dive again as the boat pitched on the sleepily gliding swell. The water plashed and the ice-flakes scraped and thumped softly against the vessel's sides. 'Twas almost comforting to feel the cold creeping farther and farther through his body. It deadened——

Yet now he was sure: so ill as things had been with him they could never be again. Now that he had a son. It was not that he thought he could be fonder of the boy than he was of his daughters. It was somewhat else. For all the heart's gladness that his little maids could give him, when they sought their father with their games and laughter and prattle—sweet as it was to hold them in his lap and feel their soft hair against his chin—yet in this wise a man could never take his place in the succession of the men of his house, if his lands and goods and the memory of his doings in the world must pass with a daughter's hand over into a strange kindred. But now, when he might hope, if God would but grant that this little son should grow to manhood, that at Formo son should come after father—Andres Gudmundssön, Simon Andressön, Andres Simonssön—now it must surely follow of itself that he must stand before Andres as his father had stood before himself, an honest man in his secret thoughts no less than in his open acts.

——Sometimes things had been so that he understood not how he could bear it any longer. Had he seen but *one* token that she understood aught! But she was to him as though they had been brother and sister by blood—careful for his well-being, kind and loving and gentle—— And he knew not how long this would last—how long they should live together in this wise in one house. Did the thought never come to her that he could not forget—that even though he was wedded with her sister, he could never quite forget that they two had been meant once to live together in wedlock?

But now he had this son. He had ever been ashamed to add in his own words aught of his wishes or his thanks when he said over his prayers. But he deemed that Christ and Mary Virgin knew well what it had meant that he had said double number of Paternosters and Aves each day in these last days. And he would keep on with this so long as he was from home. And in other wise, too, he would show his thankfulness in fitting and open-handed fashion. And thus maybe he would win help on this present journey too.

Though, indeed, he deemed himself there was little reason to look for much from this visit. Sir Erling was quite estranged now from the King. And however powerful and secure the former Regent of the realm might be, and however little he needed to fear the young King, who was much more ticklishly placed than was he—the richest and most high-born man in Norway—yet it could not be looked for that he should be willing to anger King Magnus yet more against himself by pleading Erlend Nikulaussön's cause, and bringing suspicion

on himself of having been privy to Erlend's treason. Even if he had had a part in it—aye, even if he had been at the bottom of the whole plan, ready to step in and have himself placed at the head of affairs the moment a minor King was once more upon the throne—he would scarce feel himself bound to venture aught to help the man who had brought the whole plan to ruin for the sake of a shameful love-adventure. 'Twas as though Simon half forgot it when he was with Erlend and Kristin—for they, too, seemed scarce to remember it any more. But so it was that Erlend had himself wrought the mischief—that 'twas his doing that naught else had come of the whole undertaking than ruin for himself—and for the good men who had been betrayed by his wantonness and folly.

But he must try all shifts to help her and her husband. And now he began to hope; for mayhap God and Mary Virgin, or some of the saints whom he had used to honour with offerings and almsgivings, would vouchsafe their aid in this as well.

He came to Aker somewhat late the next evening. A steward met him, and sent off men, some with the horses, some with Simon's man to the serving-men's house; while Simon himself went to the loft-room where the knight was sitting drinking. Sir Erling himself came out into the balcony straightway, and stood there while Simon mounted the stair; then he greeted his guest courteously enough, and led him into the hall, where was Stig Haakonssön of Mandvik with Erling's only son, Bjarne Erlingssön, a quite young man.

He was welcomed fairly enough—the serving-folk took from him his outer garments and bore in meat and drink. But he guessed that the men guessed—at least Sir Erling and Stig—what he was come for, and he felt that they were holding back. So when Stig began saying how rarely he was to be seen in this part of the country now—how seldom he darkened the doors of his former kinsfolk—and asked if he had ever been further south than Dyfrin since Halfrid died—Simon answered: No, not before this winter. But now he had been in Oslo some months with his wife's sister, Kristin Lavransdatter, who was wed with Erlend Nikulaussön.

On this there was a short silence. Then Sir Erling asked courteously after Kristin and Simon's wife and his brothers and sisters; and Simon asked after Lady Elin and Erling's daughters, and how things were with Stig, and how his old neighbours at Mandvik were, and what were the tidings from there.

Stig Haakonssön was a stoutly made, dark-haired man, some years

older than Simon, son of Halfrid Erlingsdatter's half-brother, Sir Haakon Toressön, and brother's son of Erling Vidkunssön's lady, Elin Toresdatter. He had lost the Wardenship of Skidu and the Governorship of the Tunsberg castle two winters back, when he fell out with the King; but still was well enough off with his Mandvik estates. But he was a widower and childless. Simon knew him well, and had been good friends with him, as with all his first wife's kin—even if the friendship had not been over-hot. He knew exceeding well what they had all thought of Halfrid's second marriage—Sir Andres Gudmundssön's younger son was doubtless a man of substance and of good birth, but an even match for Halfrid Erlingsdatter he was not—besides that he was ten years younger; they could not understand why she had set her heart on this young man—but they must e'en let her do as she would, since she had suffered such unbearable misery with her first husband.

Erling Vidkunssön Simon had met but few times before; and then it had ever been in Lady Elin's company; and at such times no sound ever came from him—none needed say more than yes or no where she was in presence. Sir Erling had aged not a little since that time—he was grown somewhat stouter, but his form was still comely and noble, for he bore himself exceeding fairly, and it suited him well that his pale, reddish-yellow hair was now turned a shining silver-grey.

The young Bjarne Erlingssön Simon had not seen before. He had been brought up near Björgvin in the house of a cleric, a friend of Erling's—'twas said among the kindred that this was because his father would not have him live out at Giske in the midst of a pack of foolish women. Erling himself was there no more than he was forced to be, and he dared not take the boy with him on his constant journeys, for Bjarne had been weakly and ailing as a growing lad, and Erling had lost two other sons in their childhood.

The boy looked exceeding comely as he sat with the light behind him, showing his side-face. Black, tightly curling hair rolled forward over his forehead, his great eyes seemed black, his nose was large and strongly curved, the mouth full and firm and fine and the chin well formed. Withal he was tall, slender and broad-shouldered. But when Simon had to sit down to the table to eat, the serving-man moved the candle, and now he saw that the skin of Bjarne's neck was quite eaten up with the scars of scrofula—they stretched on both sides right up under the ears and forward beneath the chin, dead, dull-white patches and bluish-red stripes and swollen knots. And then Bjarne had a trick

of time and again pulling up the hood of the round fur-edged velvet cape that he wore even here in the room—pulling it up half-way over his head. When, soon after, it grew too hot for him, he would turn it down, and then draw it up again—he seemed not to know that he did it. Simon felt his hands grow quite restless at length with but looking on at this—though he tried to keep from looking.

Sir Erling scarcely took his eyes from his son—but he, too, seemed not to know that he was gazing so intently at the boy. Erling Vidkunssön's face was set and unchanging and his pale-blue eyes showed his feeling but little—but beneath the somewhat vague and watery glance there seemed to lie the cares and thought and love of endless years.

So the three elder men exchanged mannerly, sluggish talk, while Simon ate, and the youth sat fiddle-faddling with his hood. Afterward all four sat drinking for a fitting space of time, and then Sir Erling asked if Simon were not weary with his journey, and Stig asked if he would be pleased to sleep with him. Simon was glad to be able to put off speaking of his errand. This first evening at Aker had left him not a little cast down.

The next day, when he broached the matter, Sir Erling's answer was much what Simon had looked for. He said that King Magnus had never hearkened to him willingly, and he had seen, from the time Magnus Eirikssön was old enough to have a will of his own, that his will had been that Erling Vidkunssön should have naught to say in his affairs when once he was of age. And since the quarrel between him and his friends on the one side, and the King on the other, had been made up, he had heard, and tried to hear, naught of the King or the King's friends. If he pleaded Erlend's cause with King Magnus, it would scarce avail the man much. He knew well enough that many in this land believed that he had been in some wise at the bottom of Erlend's undertaking. But, whether Simon believed him or not, neither he nor his friends had known aught of what was hatching. Had this matter come to light in another fashion, or had these venturesome young dare-devils risked their throw and failed, then would he have stepped in and striven to make their peace. But as things had gone, he deemed not that any could justly crave of him that he should come forward and thereby strengthen all men's suspicion that he had played a double game.

But he counselled Simon to have recourse to the Haftorssöns. They were the King's cousins, and, when they chanced not to be at feud with him, they kept up between them a friendship of a kind. And,

so far as Erling understood the matter, the men whom Erlend was shielding were rather to be found amongst the Haftorssöns' party, and among the youngest of the nobles.

Now, as Simon knew, the King was to hold his wedding in Norway this summer. And there might then be a fitting occasion for Magnus to show mildness and clemency to his enemies. And the King's mother and Lady Isabel would doubtless come to the wedding-feast. Since Simon's mother had been Queen Isabel's maid of honour in her youth, Simon might turn him to Lady Isabel, or Erlend's wife might throw herself before the King's bride and Lady Ingebjörg Haakonsdatter with prayers for their intercession.

Simon thought that the last shift of all to try would be for Kristin to kneel to Lady Ingebjörg. Had the Duchess understood what honour was, she had sure long since come forward and rescued Erlend from his straits. But when he had named this once to Erlend, he had but laughed and said, the lady had always so many ticklish matters of her own to see to; and doubtless she was angry, since it now seemed but little like that her dearest child should ever bear the name of King.

7

SPRING was come when Simon Andressön journeyed north to Toten, to fetch his wife and his little son and take them home to Formo. Then he stayed there awhile to see a little to his own affairs.

Kristin would not remove from Oslo. And she dared not yield to her hungry, burning longing for her three sons who were up there in the Dale. That she might still hold out and endure the life she was now living from day to day, she must not think on her children. She held out, she seemed calm and brave; she spoke with strangers and listened to strangers, and bore with their counsels and comfort; but to do this she must hold fast to the thought of Erlend, of Erlend alone! In the stray moments when she failed to hold fast her thoughts in the grasp of her will, pictures and thoughts flashed through her mind: Ivar stood in the wood-shed at Formo with Simon, watching his uncle intently, as he searched out a piece of wood to helve the boy's hatchet, bending and testing the sticks with his hands. Gaute's fair boyish face, set manfully as, bending forward, he struggled against the snowstorm that grey winter day in the mountains—his ski slipped back, he sank backward some way down the slope, and landed deep in a snow-drift—and for a moment his manful mien was all but gone, and he was an over-wearied, helpless child. Her thoughts would turn to the two little ones; 'twas like Munan could both walk and talk a little now—was he as lovely as the others had been at that age? Lavrans had perhaps forgotten her. And the two big ones out in the cloister at Tautra—Naakkve, Naakkve, her first-born—— How much did the two big ones understand, and what were their thoughts—how did Naakkve, child as he was, endure the thought that nothing in life now was like to be for him as she and he himself and all men had deemed that it would be?

Sira Eiliv had sent her a letter, and she had told Erlend what was written in it of their sons. Else they never spoke of their children. They spoke not any more either of the past or of the future. Kristin brought him a piece of clothing or a dish of food; he asked her how things had gone with her since he saw her last; they sat hand in

hand on his bed. Then sometimes it might chance that they were left alone a moment in the small, cold, dirty, stinking room—and they clung together with dumb, burning caresses, hearing, without marking it, Kristin's woman laughing with the watchmen outside on the stair.

Time enough, when he had either been taken from her or given back to her, to face the thought of their troop of children and the change in their lot—of all else in her life save this man beside her. She could not bear to lose an hour of the time that was left them together, and she dared not think of the meeting again with the four children she had left in the north—so she was fain to assent when Simon Andressön proffered to go alone to Trondheim and, along with Arne Gjavvaldssön, watch over her interest in the settlement of the forfeited estates. Much richer King Magnus was not like to be for Erlend's possessions—the man was more heavily in debt than he himself had had any knowledge of, and he had raised moneys that had been sent off to Denmark and Scotland and England. Erlend shrugged his shoulders and said with a half-smile that he looked not now to reap any return from *them*.

Thus Erlend's case stood much as before when Simon came back to Oslo about Holy Cross day in the autumn.* But he was dismayed to see how worn out they looked, both Kristin and his brother-in-law, and he felt a strange, sinking qualm at his heart when they both had yet enough self-mastery to thank him for coming hither at this time of year, when he could least well be spared from his estates at home. But now were all folks' faces set towards Tunsberg, where King Magnus was come to await his bride.

A little on in the month, Simon managed to hire passage in a ship bound thither, with some merchants who were to sail in eight days time. Then one morning a strange serving-man came to pray Simon Andressön to be at the pains of coming at once to St. Halvard's Chuch —Olav Kyrning waited for him there.

The Under-Treasurer was vehemently stirred. He was holding charge at the castle, whilst the Treasurer was at Tunsberg. And, the evening before, there had come a company of gentlemen who showed him a letter under King Magnus' seal, signifying that they were to inquire into Erlend Nikulaussön's case; and he had had the prisoner brought in to them. Three of them were foreigners, Frenchmen doubtless—Olav had not understood their speech, but the chaplain had spoken with them in Latin this morning, and " 'tis said they are

* 14th September.

kinsmen of the lady who is to be our Queen—a fair beginning!" They had put Erlend to the question by torture—they had with them a kind of ladder and some fellows used to work such things. To-day he had denied to bring Erlend out of his chamber, and had set a strong watch—for so much he was ready to answer, for these were lawless doings, such as never were heard tell of in Norway before!

Simon borrowed a horse from one of the priests of the church and rode with Olav straightway out to Akersnes.

Olav Kyrning looked a little fearfully at the other's grimly set face, over which stormy waves of red were beating. Now and again Simon made a wild, violent movement, as if knowing not what he did—and the strange horse leapt aside, reared and balked under this rider.

"One can see on you, Simon, that you are angered," said Olav Kyrning.

Simon scarce knew himself what was uppermost in his mind. He was so stirred to the depths that at times he felt qualms of sickness. The blind and wild feeling that struggled in him and goaded him to utmost fury was a kind of shame—a helpless man, without weapon or defence, forced to suffer strangers' fists in his clothes, strangers manhandling his body—it was like hearing of the outraging of women; he grew dizzy with thirst for revenge, with longing to see blood shed for it. No—such things had never been the use and wont of this land—would they accustom Norwegian nobles to suffer such things——? That should never be!

He was sick for horror of what he was to see—fear of the shame he must bring on another man by seeing him in such a pass overpowered him above all other feelings, when Olav Kyrning opened to him the door of Erlend's cell.

Erlend lay on the floor, stretched out aslant from one corner of the room to the other; he was so tall that only thus could he find room to stretch out at full length. Some straw and clothes had been laid under him on the thick layer of filth that covered the floor, and his body was covered over with his dark-blue fur-lined cloak right up to the chin, so that the soft grey-brown marten fur mingled with the curly, tufted black beard Erlend had grown while in his prison.

His mouth showed white through the beard; his face was snow-white. The great, straight-lined triangle of the nose stood out monstrously high above the sunken cheeks, the grizzled hair lay in clammy, separate wisps back from the high, narrow forehead—on each of the hollow temples was a great bluish-red mark, as though something had pressed on or gripped him there.

Slowly, with labour, he opened his great sea-blue eyes; essayed a sort of smile when he recognized the men; his voice sounded a little veiled and like a stranger's.

"Sit down, brother-in-law——" He moved his head slightly toward the empty bed. "Aye—now have I learned somewhat new—since we last met——"

Olav Kyrning bent over Erlend and asked if there was aught he would. There was no answer—doubtless because Erlend could not speak—and he took away the cloak from over him. Erlend had on him naught but a pair of linen drawers and a rag of shirt—and the sight of the swollen and discoloured limbs shook and maddened Simon like some loathsome horror. He wondered whether Erlend had a like feeling—a shade of red came over his face as Olav passed a wet cloth, which he dipped into a vessel of water, down over his arms and legs. And when he laid the cloak over again, Erlend pushed it into place with some small movements of his limbs and by drawing the hood up with his chin, till he was quite covered up.

"Aye," said Erlend—he was a little more like himself in voice now, and the smile on his pale mouth was a little plainer; "next time—will be worse! But I am not afraid—none need be afraid—they will break naught out of me—in this way——"

Simon felt within himself that the man spoke the truth. Torture would not force a word out of Erlend Nikulaussön. There was naught that he might not do, might not reveal, in anger or in recklessness—he would never be moved a hair's breadth by force. And Simon felt that the shame and insult that he himself suffered on another man's behalf, Erlend scarce felt at all—he was filled with an obstinate joy in defying his torturers and a contented trust in his hardihood. He, who ever broke down so pitifully when he came up against a firm will, who might himself doubtless have been cruel in a moment of fear, rose above himself now that in this cruelty he scented an opposer weaker than himself.

But Simon's answer, growled through his teeth, was:

"Next time—I trow there will be none! What say you, Olav?"

Olav shook his head, but Erlend said, with a shadow of his old reckless flippancy in his voice:

"Aye, if I could but—believe it—as firmly as you! But these gentry will scarce—be content with this——" He grew ware of the working of Simon's heavy, sinewy face: "Nay, Simon—kinsman!"—Erlend would have raised himself on his elbow; the pain forced from him a strange muffled groan, and he sank back in a swoon.

Olav and Simon ministered to him clumsily. When the swoon was over, Erlend lay a little with open eyes; he spoke then, more gravely:

"See you not—it means—much—for Magnus—to get on the track of—what men he would better not trust—farther than he can see them? So much unrest—and discontent—as there has been——"

"Aye—if he deems that this will quench the discontent——" said Olav Kyrning threateningly. Then said Erlend, in a low and clear voice:

"I have dealt so in this matter—that few will deem—it matters much how it goes with me—I know that myself——"

The other two men reddened. Simon had thought that Erlend saw not this himself—and never before had Lady Sunniva been so much as hinted at between them. Now Simon broke out desperately:

"How could you have borne yourself so recklessly—so madly?"

"Nay, I understand it not either—now," said Erlend simply. "But—in hell's name!—how could I have thought she could read writing? She seemed—most unlearned——"

His eyelids drooped and closed, he was nigh swooning once more. Olav Kyrning muttered about fetching something, and went out. Simon bent over Erlend, who now again lay with eyes half opened.

"Brother-in-law—was—was Erling Vidkunssön with you in this?"

Erlend shook his head a little, with a slow smile:

"By Jesus, no! We thought—either he would not be bold enough to join with us—or else he had kept all things in his own hands. But ask not, Simon—I will say naught—to any—so only am I sure not to let aught slip out——"

On a sudden Erlend whispered his wife's name. Simon bent over him again—he looked the other should ask him to bring Kristin to him now. But he said quickly, as if in a flicker of fever:

"She must not hear of this, Simon. Say order has come from the King that none is to come near me. Take her out to Munan—to Skogheim—hear you?—these French—or Moorish—new friends—of our King's—will not give up yet! Get her out of the city before it is noised about! Simon?"

"Aye." How he was to bring this about he knew not.

Erlend lay a little with his eyes shut. Then he said, with a kind of smile:

"I thought last night—of the time she bore our eldest son—she was in no better case than I—if a man may judge by her crying. And if she has been able to bear it—seven times—for the sake of our joys—I trow that I can——"

Simon was silent. The fearful shrinking he felt—from looking into life's deepest secrets of torment and of joy—Erlend seemed yet to have no touch of. He played with the worst and the loveliest things as simply as a guileless boy, whose friends have brought him with them to a bordel, drunken and curious. . . .

Erlend shook his head impatiently:

"These flies—are the worst—— Methinks they are the foul fiend himself——"

Simon took his cap, and smote high and low at the thick clusters of blue-black flies, so that they flew up in the air in buzzing noisy clouds—and trampled furiously into the mud of the floor those that fell stunned. It could not avail much, for the window-hole in the wall stood open—the winter before, it had been closed with a wooden shutter with a bladder-covered port-hole, but that had made the room too dark.

But he was still at this when Olav Kyrning came back with a priest bearing a drinking-cup. The priest lifted Erlend's head, and stayed it while he drank. A great deal of the liquor ran out into his beard and down his neck, and he lay quiet and untroubled as a child when the priest afterward wiped it away with a cloth.

Simon felt his whole being in a ferment; the blood thumped and thumped in his neck below the ears, and his heart beat strangely and unsteadily. He stood a moment gazing back from the doorway at the long body outstretched beneath the cloak. The flush of fever came and went now in waves over Erlend's face; he lay with half-open glittering eyes, but he smiled to his brother-in-law, the shadow of his strangely boyish smile.

The next day, as Stig Haakonssön of Mandvik sat at the breakfast-board with his guests, Sir Erling Vidkunssön and his son Bjarne, the hoof-beats of a single horse were heard in the court-yard. The next moment the door of the hall was flung open, and Simon Andressön came swiftly towards them. He wiped his face with his sleeve as he came—he was splashed to the neck with mud from his ride.

The three men rose to meet the comer, with little outbursts, half of greeting, half of wonder. Simon answered not their greetings—he stood leaning on his sword, both hands upon the hilt, and said:

"Would you hear strange tidings? They have taken Erlend Nikulaussön and stretched him on a rack—some foreigners the King sent to put him to the question——"

With a cry the men gathered round Simon Andressön. Stig smote one hand into the other:

"What has he said——?"

At the same moment both he and Bjarne Erlingssön turned, as though unwittingly, toward Sir Erling. Simon burst out into laughter —he laughed and laughed.

He sank down on the chair that Bjarne Erlingssön had drawn forward for him, took the ale-bowl that the youth proffered him, and drank greedily.

"Why laugh you?" asked Sir Erling sternly.

"I laughed at Stig." He sat a little bent forward, with his hands resting on his muddy thighs—yet once or twice again little bursts of laughter came from him. "I thought—we are sons of nobles, all of us here—I had looked that you would be so wroth that one of our fellows should be so dealt with, that you would have asked first how such things can be. . . .

"I cannot say that I know to a hair how the law stands in such matters. Since my lord King Haakon died, it hath been enough for me that I owed him that came to his throne my service when he listed to call for it, in war and in peace—else have I dwelt in quiet upon my estates. But I cannot see aught else than that in this case against Erlend Nikulaussön there have been unlawful doings. His fellows had sifted his case and given judgment in it—with how much right they doomed him to death, I know not—then was he offered reprieve and safe-conduct till he could be brought to a meeting with the King, his kinsman—that perchance he might grant Erlend grace to make his peace with him. . . . Since has the man lain in the tower of Akers Castle nigh on a year, and the King has been abroad wellnigh all that time—some letters have passed to and fro—naught has come of it. Then he sends hither some varlets—Norsemen they are not, nor of the King's guard—and tries to put Erlend to the question in such wise as none ever heard that a Norseman with a Guardsman's rights was dealt with before—this while there is peace in the land, and Erlend's fellows and his kinsmen are gathering at Tunsberg to honour the King's wedding. . . .

"What think you of this, Sir Erling?"

"I think——" Erling sat down on the bench over against him. "I deem that you have set the matter forth clearly and plainly, Simon Darre, as it stands. I see not that the King can do aught but one of three things: Either must he let Erlend pay the penalty according to

the doom given at Nidaros—or he must choose out a new court of Guardsmen and have the case against Erlend set forth by a man who bears not the knightly name, and they must doom Erlend to outlawry with such respite as the law allows for him to remove himself from King Magnus' realm—or he must grant Erlend grace to make his peace with him. And that would be the wisest thing that he could do.

"This matter seems to me now so plain that whomsoever you will lay it before at Tunsberg will join with you and take up your cause. Jon Haftorssön and his brother are there. Erlend is their kinsman no less than the King's. And the Ogmundssön brothers must see that this is injustice and folly. 'Twere best you went first to the Lord Marshal—move him and Sir Paal Eirikssön to call a meeting of the sworn King's-men that are in the town now and that seem fittest to take the matter in hand——"

"Will not you and your kinsmen go with me, my lord?"

"We mean not to go to the wedding-feast," said Erling shortly.

"The Haftorssöns are young—and Sir Paal is old and ailing—and the others—— You know best yourself, my lord,—they doubtless have some small power, through the King's favour and suchlike, but—Erling Vidkunssön, what are they all beside you? You, Sir, you have such power in this land as no other chief has had since—I know not when. Behind you, Sir, are the old houses that folk in this land have known man by man, so far back as record goes of evil times and good times in these our country-sides. On the father's side—what is the birth of Magnus Eirikssön or Haftor of Sudrheim's sons beside yours—are their riches worth naming beside yours? These counsels you give me—all this will take time, and these Frenchmen are in Oslo, and you may stake your soul that they will not give over. . . . Olav Kyrning has sent letters, and all gentlemen he could find to join with him, the Bishop promised he would write—but all this unrest and strife, Erling Vidkunssön, *you* could end it, in the same hour you stepped forth before King Magnus. You stand foremost among the heirs of those that ruled this land in the old age—the King knows that you would have us all at your back." . . .

"I can scarce say that I marked as much some time back," said Erling bitterly. "You speak out warmly for your brother-in-law, Simon—but can you not understand? *Now* I cannot move. It would be said: the very moment they put such duress on Erlend that a man might fear he would not be able to keep his tongue between his teeth—that moment I came forward!"

There was silence for a while. Then Stig asked again:

"Has—Erlend spoken?"

"No," answered Simon impatiently. "He has held his tongue. And I trow he will go on holding it. Erling Vidkunssön," he said beseechingly, "he is your kinsman—you were friends——"

Erling breathed short and heavily once or twice.

"Aye.—Simon Andressön, have you fully understood *what* Erlend Nikulaussön had undertaken? To put an end to this sharing of our King with the Swedes—this way of rule that never has been tried before—that seems to bring more and more hardships and troubles on this land with each year that passes; to bring us back to the kingship that we knew of old, and that we know brings welfare and good fortune. See you not that this was a wise and a bold counsel—and see you not that this counsel can now hardly be taken up by others after him? He has ruined the cause of Knut Porse's sons—and other men of the kingly house there are none for the folk to rally round. You will say, mayhap, had Erlend carried through his intent and brought Prince Haakon to Norway, then had he played into *my* hands. Much further than the boy's landing had these—young boys—scarce been able to carry forward their plans without having need of prudent men to come forward and work out what remained to do. So it is—I dare avow it. Yet God knows that I gained nothing—rather had I to set aside the care of my own affairs, in those ten years when I lived in disquiet and toil and strife and troubles without end—some few men in this land have understood so much, and with that I must e'en be content." He struck his hand hard against the table. "See you not, Simon, that the man who had taken on his shoulders such mighty plans that none knows whether the welfare of us all in this land and of our children for long ages to come was not the stake in them—and flung it all from him with his breeches on a harlot's bedside!—God's blood!—he would be full well served with the measure that was dealt to Audun Hestakorn?"

He went on in a little more quietly:

"Yet would I be fain that Erlend should be saved; and believe not that I, too, am not angered at the tidings you have brought us. And I deem that, should you follow my counsel, you will find men and enough to join with you in this matter. But I believe not that my company would be of such great help to you that for the sake of it I should do well to come uncalled before the King."

Simon rose, stiffly and heavily. His face was streaked and grey with weariness. Stig Haakonssön went over and took him by the shoulders —now he would have some food brought; he had but bided till they

had had their talk out before having serving-folk in. But now Simon must strengthen himself with meat and drink, and must sleep on top of it. Simon thanked him—he must ride on in a little while, if Stig could lend him a fresh horse. And would he give shelter to his man, Jon Daalk, to-night?—Simon had had to leave the man behind on the road, for his horse could not keep up with Digerbein.* Aye, he had ridden the most of the night—he had thought, for sure, that he knew the road out hither well enough—but yet he had gone astray more than once.

Stig bade him stay till to-morrow, and he would ride with him himself—at the least a part of the way—aye, and he might as well go on to Tunsberg with him too. . . .

Simon said:

"Here is naught more for me to stay for. I would but go over to the Church—seeing that I am here once more, I would yet fain say a prayer where Halfrid lies——"

The blood rushed and tingled in his weary body; his heart beat deafeningly. It was as though he must drop down headlong; he was as one but half awake. But he heard his own voice say, calmly and evenly:

"Will not you bear me company, Sir Erling? I know she held you dearest of all her kinsmen."

He looked not at the other, but felt him stiffen. In a little he heard, through the rushing and singing of his own blood, Erling Vidkunssön's clear and courteous voice:

"That will I, willingly, Simon Darre.—It is rough weather," he said, as he buckled on his sword and threw a thick cloak about his shoulders. Simon stood still as a stone till the other was ready. Then they went out.

Without, the autumn rain poured down, and the mist drove in from the sea so thickly that they could scarce see more than a couple of horses' lengths over the fields and the yellow tree-clumps that bordered the path on each side. It was no long way to the church. Simon fetched the key from the chaplain's house near by—he was glad when he saw they were new folk, come since his time, since so he was spared much talk.

It was a little stone church with a single altar. Unheedingly Simon saw again the same pictures and ornaments he had seen so many hundred times, while he knelt by the white marble tomb a little way from

* Digerbein = Big-legs.

Erling Vidkunssön, saying over his prayers, and crossing himself where 'twas fit—without knowing what he did.

He understood not himself that he had been able to try this. But now he was in the midst of it. Of what he should say, he had no guess—but, sick with horror and shame at himself as he was, he knew that he would make the trial at all costs.

He remembered the ageing woman's white, suffering face deep in the half-darkness of the bed, her lovely gentle voice—that afternoon when he sat on her bedside and she told him. It was a month before the child came—and she herself looked that it should cost her life—and she was willing and glad to buy their son so dear. The poor little soul that lay here beneath the great stone in a little coffin by his mother's side—— No, no man could do what he had meant to do. . . .

But Kristin's white face. She knew what had befallen, when he came home from Akersnes that day. Pale and calm she was as she spoke of it and questioned him—but he had seen her eyes in one short glimpse, and he had not dared to meet them after. Where she was now, or what she had done, he knew not—whether she had stayed in her lodging or was with her husband, or whether they had prevailed on her to go to Skogheim; he had left it in Olav Kyrning's and Sira Ingolf's hands—he could do no more, and he deemed that he must lose no time. . . .

Simon knew not that he had hidden his face in his hands. Halfrid—there is naught in it of shame or of sin, my Halfrid.—And yet—what she had said to him, her husband—of her sorrow, and of her love that had made her stay on under the old devil's roof. Once already had he killed his child under its mother's heart—and she had stayed on with him because she would not tempt her dearest love. . . .

Erling Vidkunssön knelt, his colourless, clear-cut face showing no sign. His hands he held close in to his breast, with the palms pressed together; from time to time he crossed himself with a quiet, supple, gracious gesture, then brought his finger-tips again together.

No, thought Simon. This was so hateful a thing that no man could do it. Not even for Kristin's sake could he do it.—They rose together, made obeisance to the altar, and went down the nave; Simon's spurs jingled a little at each step he took on the stone pavement. As yet they had spoken no word together since they had left the manor, and Simon knew not at all what would now come.

He locked the church-door; and Erling Vidkunssön walked ahead

through the graveyard. Under the little roof of the lich-gate he stopped. Simon came up; they stood a little in the shelter before going out into the pouring rain.

Erling Vidkunssön spoke quietly and evenly, but Simon felt the dull, measureless rage muttering deep within the other—he dared not look up.

"In the devil's name, Simon Andressön, what mean you by—devising—this?"

Simon could not answer a word.

"Think you that you can threaten me—force me to do your will—because, maybe, you have heard some lying rumours of things that befell when you were scarce yet weaned from the breast——?" His rage growled nearer the surface now.

Simon shook his head:

"I thought, my lord, when you called to mind her who was better than the purest gold—mayhap you might take pity on Erlend's wife and children."

Sir Erling looked at him—he made no answer, but began stripping moss and lichen from the stones of the churchyard wall. Simon swallowed, and wet his lips with his tongue:

"I scarce know what I thought, Erling Vidkunssön—maybe that when you remembered her that suffered all those evil years—without other comfort or help than God alone—that then you would help so many unhappy beings—for you can!—since you could not help her. If you have repented at any time that you rode away from Mandvik yonder day and let Halfrid remain behind in Sir Finn's power——"

"But I have not!" Erling's voice was piercing now. "For I know that *she* never did—but this I trow *you* could not understand. For had you ever understood for one hour how proud she was, the lady you won to wife"—he laughed in his wrath—"then had you not done this. I know not how much you know—but you may as lief know this. They sent me—for Haakon lay sick then—to fetch her home to her kindred. Elin and she had grown up together as sisters—they were wellnigh of an age, though Elin was her father's sister;—we had—things had come about so that, had she come home from Mandvik, we had been forced to meet daily and hourly. We sat and talked, a whole night through, in the balcony of the dragon-house—every word that was spoken both she and I can answer for to God on the day of doom. And then let *Him* answer *us*, why it should have been so——

"Though, indeed, God rewarded her holiness in the end. Gave her a good husband to comfort her for the one she had had before—a

whelp of a boy like you—who lay with her serving-women in her own house—and had her bring up your bastards——" He flung away the ball of moss he had kneaded together.

Simon stood motionless and dumb. Erling peeled off a flake of moss again and flung it away:

"I did what *she* bade me. Have you heard enough? There was no other way. Wherever else in the world we might have met, we had—we had—— 'Adultery' is no fair word. 'Incest'—is yet uglier——"

Simon moved his head in a stiff little nod.

He felt it himself—it would be laughable to say what he thought. Erling Vidkunssön had been a man in the twenties, courtly and gallant. Halfrid had loved him so that she would fain have kissed his footprints in the dewy grass of the court-yard that morning in spring. *He* was an ageing, hulking, ugly farmer—and Kristin? Never, for sure, would the thought come in her head that there would be peril to the soul of either, should they live under one roof for twenty years. Surely he had learnt to understand that well enough. . . .

So he said in a low voice, almost humbly:

"She had not the heart to suffer the innocent child, even though 'twas her woman's child by her husband, to fare ill in the world. *She* it was that prayed me to do it right and justice so far as lay in my power. Oh, Erling Vidkunssön—for Erlend's poor innocent wife's sake—— She will grieve to death. Methought I could not leave any stone unturned in seeking help for her and all her children——"

Erling Vidkunssön stood leaning against the gate-post. His face was calm as it was wont to be, and his voice cool and courteous, when he spoke again:

"I liked her well, Kristin Lavransdatter, the little I have seen of her—a fair and stately woman she is—and I have told you already, Simon Andressön, I deem full surely that you will find help if you will follow my counsel. But I understand not rightly what you mean by this—strange device. You surely cannot think that because I had to suffer my father's brother to rule the matter of my wedding, being then in my nonage, and because the maid I liked best was betrothed elsewhere when we first met—— And so innocent as you say, I trow Erlend's wife is not, either. Aye, you are wedded to her sister, I know it; but you and not I have brought about this—strange parley—and so you must suffer that I name it. I mind me there was talk enough about it, the time Erlend was wed with her—'twas against Lavrans Björgulfssön's counsel and his will that that bargain came about; but the maid had thought more of having her own will than

of obeying her father or guarding her honour. Aye, she may be a good wife none the less—but she *won* Erlend after all, and they have doubtless had their time of joy and mirth. I trow that Lavrans had never much joy of that son-in-law—*he* had chosen another man for his daughter ere she came to know Erlend—she was promised in marriage, I know——" He stopped short, looked at Simon a moment, and turned his head aside in some confusion.

Flushing red with shame, Simon bent his head on his breast, but he spoke, none the less, low but firmly:

"Aye; she was promised to me."

For a moment they stood, not venturing to look at each other. Then Erling Vidkunssön threw away the last ball of moss he had gathered, turned, and went out into the rain. Simon was left standing alone—but when the other was some way off in the mist, he stopped and beckoned impatiently.

Then they went back together, as silently as they had come. When they had wellnigh reached the manor, Sir Erling said:

"I will do it, Simon Andressön. You must wait until to-morrow; then we can ride in company, all four together."

Simon looked up at the other—with a face all drawn with pain and shame. He would have given thanks, but could not; he had to bite his lip hard, his lower jaw trembled so violently.

As they were passing through the door of the hall, Erling Vidkunssön touched Simon's shoulder, as it were by chance. But each knew that neither of them dared look at the other.

Next day, when they were making them ready for the journey, Stig Haakonssön pressed Simon to let him lend him clothes—Simon had brought no change of garments with him. Simon looked down at himself—his man had brushed and cleaned up his dress, but it had suffered past remedy in his long ride through foul weather. But he slapped himself on the thighs:

"I am too fat, Stig.—And I go not thither to be a guest at the feasting."

Erling Vidkunssön stood with one foot on the bench, while his son buckled the gilded spur on it—it seemed as though Sir Erling tried to keep his serving-folk at a distance to-day as much as might be. The knight laughed in an oddly vexed fashion:

" 'Twill do no hurt, I trow, if it should show on Simon Darre that he has not spared himself in his kinsman's service, but bursts right in from the high road with his bold and subtle speech. He is no tongue-

tied loon, this one-time kinsman of ours, Stig. One thing only I fear—that he may not know himself when he should stop——"

Simon stood there, flushing darkly, but he said no word. In all that Erling Vidkunssön had said to him since the day before, he marked a grudging mockery—and a strange, unwilling kindness—and a firm will to see this matter through—since, once and for all, he had taken it up.

So they rode with him north from Mandvik, Sir Erling, his son and Stig, with, in all, ten fairly clad and well-armed yeomen. Simon with his single follower thought now he could have chosen to come to the meeting more fittingly attended and equipped—Simon Darre of Formo had no need to ride with his former kinsmen in the guise of a small franklin that had sought their aid in his helplessness. But he heeded not much. He was so weary and so broken with what he had gone through the day before, that almost it seemed to him now he cared not what the outcome of this journey might be.

Simon had ever averred that he put no faith in the ugly rumours about King Magnus. He was no such saint but that he could suffer a gross jest amongst grown-up menfolk. But when people stuck their heads together and muttered shudderingly of dark and secret sins, he ever grew ill at ease. And it seemed to him unseemly to believe or to hearken to aught of the kind about the King among whose sworn men he was counted.

Yet was he filled with wonder when he stood before the young King. He had not seen Magnus Eirikssön since the King was a child, and, in spite of his disbelief, he had looked to find something womanish, soft or unhealthy about him—but this was one of the properest young men Simon had set eyes on—and he looked manly and kingly too, despite of his youth and slender fineness.

He wore a flowing robe of light blue shot with green, falling to his feet, and girt about his slim waist with a gilded belt, and he bore his tall, lean body with exceeding grace in the heavy dress. King Magnus had light hair, which lay smoothly on his well-formed head, but was cunningly curled at the ends, so that it seemed to toss and wave about his neck's broad, free-standing pillar. His features were fine and boldly cut, the hue of his skin fresh, with red cheeks and a yellowish tinge of sunburn; he had clear eyes and an open look. He bore him fairly and with winning gentleness as he greeted his liege men. Then in a while he laid his hand on Erling Vidkunssön's sleeve and drew him

some steps apart from the others, while he thanked him for his coming.

They talked together awhile, and Erling let fall that there was a special matter wherein he had to crave the King's grace and bounty. The royal ushers then set a chair for the knight in front of the King's high seat, showed the other three men to places somewhat further down the hall, and then went out.

Without effort Simon seemed to have found again the mannerly and courtly bearing he had learned in his youth, and, since he had yielded and taken from Stig the loan of a long brown dress of state, in outward looks, too, he differed in no wise from the other men. But as he sat there he felt as though he were in the midst of a dream—he was and he was not the same as yonder young Simon Darre, the quick-witted and *kurteis* son of a noble knight, who had borne napkin and taper before King Haakon in Oslo Palace an endless tale of winters agone—he was and he was not Simon, the esquire of Formo, who had lived a life of freedom and cheer away north in the Dale through all these years—free from care, after a fashion, though he had known all his days that within him lay this glowing ember—but he turned his thoughts away from it. A dull and threatening humour of revolt rose up in the man—it was no willed sin or fault of his that he knew of, but fate, that had blown the embers into a blaze, so that he must strive and make no sign while roasting over a slow fire.

He stood up when all the others did so—King Magnus had risen:

"Dear kinsman," came his young, fresh voice, "methinks the matter stands thus. The Prince is my brother, but we have never tried to keep court together with a common guard—the same men cannot serve us both. Nor does it seem that Erlend had meant that things should continue in such wise—even though for a time he did hold his Wardenship under my hand, while at the same time he was Haakon's sworn man. But those of my men who would liefer follow my brother Haakon shall have leave from my service and freedom to seek their fortune in his house. Who they may be—that I mean to learn from Erlend's mouth."

"Then must you, Sir King, try if you can come to agreement with Erlend Nikulaussön in this matter. You must keep the promise of safe-conduct that you have given, and grant your kinsman an audience——"

"Aye, he is my kinsman and your kinsman, and Sir Ivar moved me to promise him safe-conduct—but *he* kept not his oaths to me, and *he* remembered not the kinship betwixt us." King Magnus laughed a little and again laid his hand on Erling's arm. "My kinsmen seem

to be faithful to the byword we have in this land: None so unkind as kin. Now is it my full will to show my kinsman Erlend of Husaby grace for the sake of God and Mary Virgin, and for my own lady's sake; life and goods and leave here to abide, if he will make his peace with me—lawful respite to remove him from my lands, if he would betake him to his new master, Prince Haakon.—The same grace will I grant to every man who has been leagued with him—but I will know who they are, and which of my men dwelling up and down this land of ours has been a false servant to his lord. What say you, Simon Andressön?—I know that your father was my grandfather's trusty henchman; you yourself served King Haakon with honour—think you not that I have the right to make inquiry in this matter?"

"I think, my lord King"—Simon stepped forward and again made obeisance—"that so long as your grace rules according to this land's law and custom, mercifully, you will surely never learn who the men may be that had planned to have recourse to lawlessness and treason. For as soon as the people of this land see that your Grace will hold fast to the right and justice that your forefathers have set up, of a surety no man in this realm will think of troubling the peace. And those will be silent and will bethink them again, to whom for a time it may have seemed hard to believe that you, my Lord, young as you are, could rule two great kingdoms with wisdom and strength."

"It is so, my lord King," put in Erling Vidkunssön. "No man in this land has thought of denying you obedience in aught that you may command rightfully——"

"Have they not? Then you deem, maybe, that Erlend has not been guilty of disloyalty and treason—when we look more closely into the case?"

For a moment Sir Erling seemed at fault for an answer, and Simon took the word:

"You, Sir, are our lord—to you each man looks to punish law-breaking by the law. But if you should follow where Erlend Nikulaussön has led the way, it might well befall that the men whose names you now so hotly seek to know should come forth and name them aloud, or other men who may begin to ponder over the rights and wrongs of this matter—for much talk will there come to be of it if your Grace should deal as you have threatened with a man so well-known and so high-born as Erlend Nikulaussön."

"What mean you, Simon Andressön?" said the King sharply—he grew red as he spoke.

"Simon means," Bjarne Erlingssön broke in, "that it might do your

Grace an ill service if folk should begin to ask why Erlend must suffer such dishonour as the law warrants all men against, save thieves and nithings.* They might come then to think on King Haakon's other grandsons——"

Erling Vidkunssön turned sharply on his son—he looked angry—but the King only asked dryly:

"Count you not traitors and rebels as nithings?"

"None *call* them so, Sir, if their plans speed well," answered Bjarne.

For a moment all stood silent. Then Erling Vidkunssön spoke: "Whatever Erlend should be called, my lord, it beseems not that you should override the law to come at him——"

"Then should the law be mended in this matter," said the King vehemently. "If 'tis so that I have no power to get me by all means the knowledge of how folk mean to keep faith with me——"

"Yet can you not act upon a mended law before it is changed," said Sir Erling doggedly, "without oppressing the folk of the land—and that folk has ever found it hard to use itself to oppression from its Kings."

"I have my knighthood and my sworn King's-men to back me," answered Magnus Eirikssön with a boyish laugh. "What say you, Simon?"

"I say, my lord—it might well prove that that was no such sure backing—to judge by the measure the knighthood and the nobles of Denmark and Sweden have dealt their Kings when the commons had no strength to back up the kingly power against them. But if your Grace be set upon such counsels, then would I pray that you will loose me from your service—for then would I liefer be found among the common folk."

Simon had spoken so calmly and soberly that it seemed as though the King at first understood not his meaning. Then he laughed:

"Is this a threat, Simon Andressön?—Is it so that you would throw down your glove to me?"

"That must be as you will, my lord," said Simon as evenly as before; but he took his gloves out of his belt and held them in his hand. Then young Bjarne bent forward and took them:

"These are not seemly wedding-gloves for your Grace to buy!" He held the thick, worn riding-gloves in the air and laughed. "If it should come out, Sir, that you are seeking for such gloves, you might well have proffered you all too many of them—and all too cheap."

Erling Vidkunssön uttered a cry. With a sharp movement he

* Note 18.

seemed to sweep the young King to one side, and the three men to another; and he drove the men down the hall toward the door:

"I must speak with the King alone."

"No, no! I would speak with Bjarne!" cried the King, running after. But Sir Erling pushed his son out with the others.

They loitered about awhile in the castle yard and on the hill outside—none of them spoke a word. Stig Haakonssön looked doubtfully, but held his tongue as he had done throughout; Bjarne Erlingssön went about all the time with a little, hidden smile. In a while Sir Erling's weapon-bearer came and prayed them from his master to wait for him at their lodging—their horses were in the castle yard.

Afterward they sat in the inn. They were shy of speech about what had just befallen—at last they fell into talk of their horses and hounds and hawks. The end of it was that Stig and Simon sat far on into the evening telling stories about women. Stig Haakonssön had always great store of such tales, but with Simon the worst was that most of those he called to mind Stig straightway began to tell, and 'twas ever so that either the thing had happened to himself, or it had befallen of late at some place near Mandvik—even if Simon remembered having heard the tale in his boyhood from the house-carls at home at Dyfrin.

But he chuckled and laughed as heartily as Stig. From time to time it was as though the bench rocked beneath him as he sat there—he was afraid of something, but dared not think what it was. Bjarne Erlingssön laughed quietly, drank wine and munched apples, fiddled with the hood of his cape, and told now and then a little snatch of a tale—they were the worst of all, but they were so cunningly veiled that Stig did not understand them. Bjarne had heard them from a priest in Björgvin, he said.

At last Erling came. His son went to meet him and take from him his outer garments. Erling turned angrily on the youth:

"You!" He flung his cloak into Bjarne's hands—and there flitted across his face, as though against his will, the shadow of a smile. He turned to Simon:

"Aye—now must you be content, Simon Andressön! I make no doubt that now you may safely hope the day is not far off when you shall sit in peace and comfort together on your neighbouring manors—you and Erlend—and his wife and all their sons."

Simon had grown a shade paler when he stood up and thanked Sir Erling.—He knew now what the fear was that he had not dared to look in the face. But now there was no way out. . . .

About fourteen days after, Erlend Nikulaussön was set free. Simon, with his two men and Ulf Haldorssön, rode out to Akersnes and fetched him.

The trees were almost bare already, for it had blown hard the week before. A black frost had set in now—the earth rang hard under the horses' hoofs, and the fields were wan with rime, as they rode in toward the town. It looked as though snow were coming—the heavens were evenly overspread with cloud and the daylight was sullen and chilly grey.

Simon had seen that Erlend dragged one foot a little, as he came out into the castle yard, and he seemed somewhat stiff and unhandy in mounting. He was very pale, too. He had had his beard taken off and his hair cut and made trim—his upper face was now a dull yellow, and, below, the blue of his shaven beard showed against white cheeks and chin; there were hollows beneath his eyes. But he made a stately figure in his long dark-blue robe and cloak, and, as he said farewell to Olav Kyrning, and made gifts of money to the men who had guarded him and brought him food in prison, he bore him like a chieftain parting from the house-folk at a wedding-feast.

At first, as they rode, he seemed to feel cold; he shivered more than once. Then a little colour came into his cheeks—his face lighted up—it was as though sap and life were welling up in him. Simon thought: sure it was Erlend was no easier to break than a willow wand.

They came to the lodging, and Kristin went to meet her husband in the court-yard. Simon tried not to look thither, but he could not forbear.

They gave each other their hands and exchanged some words, in quiet, clear tones. They managed this meeting in the sight of all the people of the house in fair and seemly wise enough. Only that both flushed red, looked at each other a second, and then both dropped their eyes. Then Erlend proffered his hand again to his wife, and they went together toward the loft-room where they were to dwell whilst they were in the city.

Simon turned towards the room where he and Kristin had lived till now. Then Kristin turned at the lowest step of the stairway and called to him, in a wonderful ringing voice:

"Will you not come, brother-in-law?—get you some food first—and you, Ulf!"

She seemed so young and supple as she stood there, turned a little from the hips, and looked back over her shoulder. As soon as she came to Oslo, she had begun to fasten her head-gear in another fashion.

Here in the south it was only small farmers' wives who wore the linen head-dress in the old-world way she had used ever since she was wedded; tight round the face like a nun's coif, with the falls fastened cross-wise over the shoulders so that the neck was quite hid, and with many folds on the sides and over the knot of hair at the back of the head. In Trondheim it was accounted, so to speak, a token of piety to set up the coif in this fashion, which Archbishop Eiliv praised always as the most fitting and modest way for wedded women. But so as not to be too much marked out, she had taken up now with the fashion of these southern parts: the linen cloth laid smoothly over the crown of the head and hanging straight down behind, so that the front hair showed, and the neck and shoulders were free—and then it was the proper thing that the plaits should be but tied up so that they did not show under the edge of the coif, while the linen fitted close above, throwing out the form of the head. True, Simon had seen this before and deemed that it became her well—yet he had not seen before how young it made her look. And her eyes shone like stars.

Farther on in the day many folk appeared to greet Erlend—Ketil of Skog, Markus Torgeirssön, and later in the evening Olav Kyrning himself, Sira Ingolf and Canon Guttorm, a priest of St. Halvard's Church. When the two priests came it had begun to snow—a slight dry fine-grained drizzle—and they had missed the path and come in among some burdocks—their clothes were full of the burrs. Everyone set to work to pluck burrs off the priests and their followers—Erlend and Kristin rid Canon Guttorm of his—from time to time their faces flushed, and their voices were strangely unsteady, as they jested with the priest and laughed.

Simon drank much in the first part of the evening, but he grew not at all light-headed with the drink—only a little heavy in the body. He heard each word that was said with unnatural sharpness. The others soon grew free-spoken—none of them were friends to the King.

He was heartily sick of it all now 'twas all over. Foolish prate it was that they babbled forth as they sat there—loud-voiced and heated. Ketil Aasmundssön was somewhat simple, and his brother-in-law Markus was none too wise either; Olav Kyrning was a right-minded and sensible man, but short-sighted—neither did the two priests seem to Simon too clear-witted. They all sat there and listened to Erlend and chimed in with him, and he grew more and more like himself as he had ever been, wild and reckless. He had taken Kristin's hand now, and laid it over his knee, and sat playing with her fingers—

they sat so that their shoulders touched. Now the deep flush showed clear through her skin, she could not take her eyes from him—when he stole an arm about her waist, her mouth trembled, so that she had much ado keeping her lips shut. . . .

Then the door opened and Munan Baardssön stepped in.

"Last came the great bull himself!" shouted Erlend, laughing, and leapt up to meet him.

"Help us God and Mary Virgin—I believe you care not a straw, Erlend," said Munan in vexation.

"Aye, deem you, then, it would help ought to whimper and sorrow now, kinsman?"

"Never have I seen the like of you—all your welfare have you cast away——"

"Aye—for I was never the kind to go unbreeched to hell, to save my breeches from the burning," said Erlend, and Kristin laughed softly and dizzily.

Simon laid him down over the table, his head between his arms. If only they might think he was so drunken already that he had fallen asleep!—he would fain be left in peace.

Nothing was otherwise than he had looked that it would be—should have looked it would be, at the least. Nothing—not even she. Here she sat, the only woman amongst all these men—as gentle and bashful and fearless and secure as ever. Even so had she been yonder other time—when she betrayed him—shameless or innocent, he knew not which. Oh, no, 'twas not so either; she had not been so secure, she had not been shameless—behind the calmness of her bearing she had not been calm.—But that man had bewitched her—for Erlend's sake she would gladly tread over red-hot stones—and she had trodden over him as though she knew not he was aught but a cold stone.

Oh, all this was folly—her mind was set on having her own way, and she heeded naught else. Let them have their joyance, he need not care a jot. What mattered it to him if they had seven sons more, so that there would be fourteen to part betwixt them the half of Lavrans Björgulfssön's estate? It looked not as though *he* would need to be careful and troubled for his children—Ramborg was not so quick at bearing children as her sister—but as though in due time he would leave behind his children and children's children in riches and power. But 'twas all one to him—to-night. He would fain have drunk more—but he knew that to-night God's gifts would not cheer him—and then he would have had to raise his head and perhaps to join in the talk.

"Aye, you think, I trow, *you* were the man for Regent of the realm," said Munan scornfully.

"Nay, surely you must know we had meant that place for you," laughed Erlend.

"In God's name, heed your tongue, man——." The others laughed.

Erlend came over and touched Simon's shoulder:

"Are you asleep, brother-in-law?" Simon looked up. The other stood before him with a goblet in his hand. "Come, drink with me, Simon. You I have to thank most of all that I came off with my life —and, such as it is, 'tis dear to me, lad! You stood by me like a brother—had you not been my brother-in-law, I trow I had lost my head for sure.—And then could you have wed my widow——"

Simon sprang up. A moment the two stood looking at each other—Erlend grew white and sobered, his lips parted in a gasp.—With his clenched fist Simon struck the goblet out of the other's hand—the mead splashed on the floor. Then he turned and went out of the room.

Erlend stood there alone. Without knowing what he did, he dried his hand and wrist with the skirt of his coat, then looked behind him; the others had not marked aught. With his foot he thrust the goblet in under the bench—he stood still a moment—then went quietly out after his brother-in-law.

Simon Darre stood at the foot of the stairway—Jon Daalk was leading his horses out of the stable. He made no movement when Erlend came down to him:

"Simon! Simon—I knew not—I knew not what I said!"

"You know it now."

Simon's voice was toneless. He stood quite still, not looking at the other.

Erlend looked about him, as at his wit's end. The moon showed dimly, a pale patch, through the veil of cloud; small hard grains of snow showered down on them. Erlend made a shivering motion.

"Where—where are you bound?" he asked dully, looking at the man and the horses.

"To seek me another lodging," said Simon shortly. "Maybe you can understand that *here* I care not to be——"

"Simon!" Erlend burst out. Oh, I know not what I would not give if it could be unsaid——!"

"Nor I either," answered the other as before.

The door of the upper room opened. Kristin came out on the balcony with a lanthorn in her hand; she bent over the railing and threw the light down on them.

"Why stand you there?" she asked in a clear voice. "What would you without the house?"

"I felt I must go out and see to my horses—as 'tis the courtly fashion to say," answered Simon, laughing up to her.

"But—you have taken your horses out," she said, in laughing wonder.

"Aye—a man will do strange things in his cups," said Simon in the same tone.

"Well, come back now," she broke in, brightly and gladly.

"Aye. In a moment." She went in, and Simon called out to Jon to take back the horses. He turned toward Erlend—the man was standing there, strangely helpless in looks and bearing. "I shall come in a little. We must—try to bear us as though this were unspoken, Erlend—for our wives' sake. But so much maybe you too can understand—you were the last man on earth that I would—would have had know of—this. And forget not that I am not so forgetful as you!"

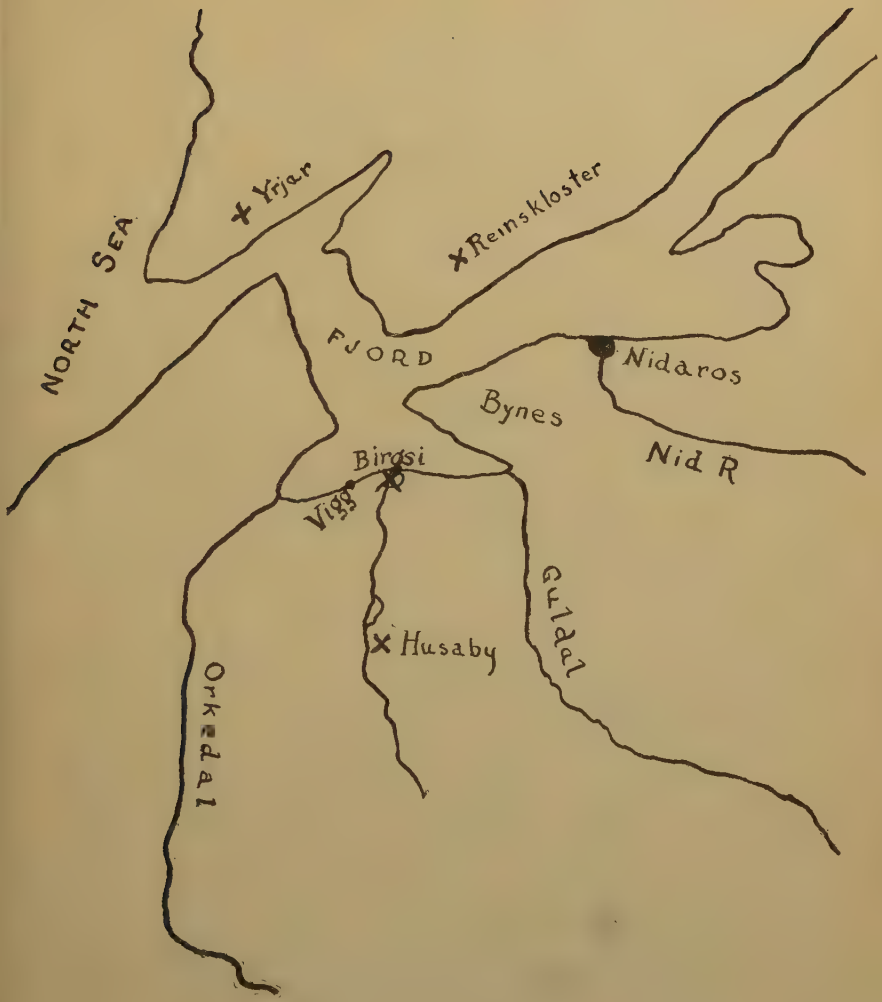
The door above was opened again; the guests came out in a troop; Kristin was with them, and her woman, bearing the lanthorn.

"Aye," tittered Munan Baardssön, "the night is well worn already—and these two good folks would fain to bed, I trow——"

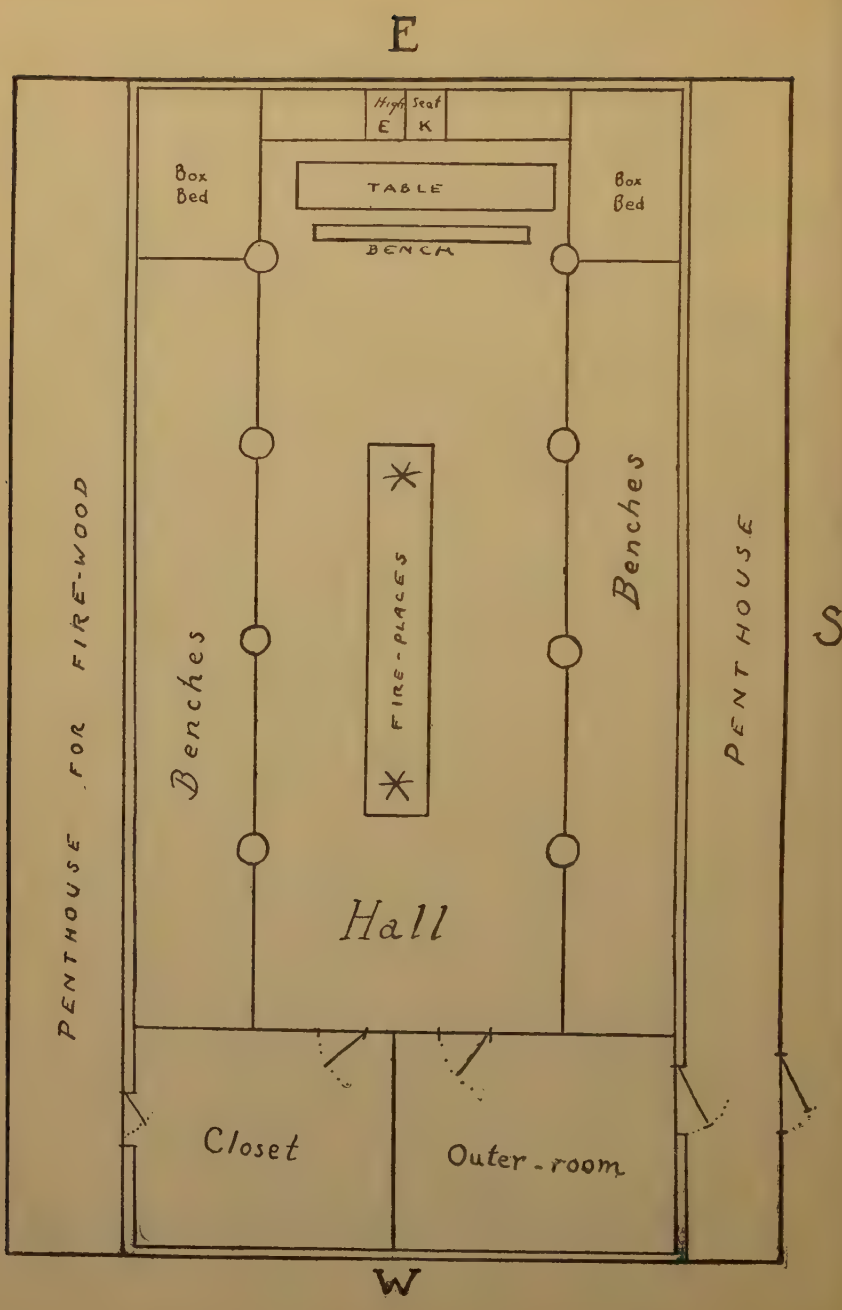
"Erlend—Erlend—Erlend!" Kristin had thrown herself into his arms the moment they stood alone within the loft-room door. She clung close and tightly to him. "Erlend—you look so sorrowful——" she whispered in fear, with her half-open lips close to his mouth. "Erlend——" She pressed the palms of her hands to his temples.

He stood a little with his arms laid loosely around her. Then, with a soft moaning sound in his throat, he crushed her to him.

Simon went across to the stable—he would have said somewhat to Jon, but he forgot it on the way. For a while he stood in the stable-door, looking up at the light-haze of the moon and the tumbling snow—it had begun now to fall in great flakes. Jon and Ulf came out and shut the door behind them, and the three men went together across to the house where they were to sleep.



· SKETCH MAP *showing* HUSABY ·


E
High Seat
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K
Box Bed
TABLE
Box Bed
BENCH
PENTHOUSE FOR FIRE-WOOD
Benches
FIRE-PLACES
Benches
PENTHOUSE
S
Hall
Closet
Outer-room
W

NOTES

1. HUSABY (*see sketch map*)

The old manor of Husaby, comprising some thirty greater and smaller farms and homesteads, lies about 20 English miles southwest of Trondhjem (Nidaros). The head-quarter buildings are on a broad mountain slope above a little lake, about 10 English miles from the nearest point on the Trondhjem Fjord (Birgsi), and between the great valleys of Guldal and Orkedal, which stretch southward up to the Dovrefjeld. The journey from Husaby to Nidaros would ordinarily be made by horse to Birgsi and thence by boat. The path followed by Kristin on her pilgrimage ran across the hills to the estuary of the Gula River, and thence across Bynes, the high promontory which shoots into the fjord between the Gula and Nid estuaries.

2. HALL AT HUSABY (*see plan*)

The hall at Husaby was a large, ancient stone building, in the style of the Saga-times, when the chieftain and his house-carls dwelt and slept under one roof—the serving-women being quartered in a separate women's house (the "little hall" of this book).

Two rows of wooden pillars supported the roof. Between the line of pillars and the wall on each side was the sleeping-accommodation—two box-beds with doors at one end of the hall, and two broad fixed benches running the rest of the length of the hall. These benches were divided into sleeping-places for the warriors (originally called "rooms"), and were wide enough to admit of each man's keeping his belongings by him, while his weapons hung on the wall above him. As in the "hearth-room house" of the later mediæval manor (see note 2 to *The Garland**), the room was heated from a hearth in the middle of the floor, and the only daylight came from the smoke-vent above this or from the door; but the hearth was much longer, and several fires were ordinarily kept burning on it, when artificial heat was required. On festival occasions long tables were set up—otherwise each man ate

* *The Bridal Wreath.*

his meals sitting in his "room," with his porridge-bowl or his meat in his lap; or drank his beer sitting on the floor by the hearth.

In later times, when a separate house was assigned to the serving-men, the "rooms" in the hall were left free to be used, when necessary, as sleeping-places for the family or guests. The high seat was moved up to the east end of the hall, and temporary tables were put up daily for the chief meal of the day (supper).

Later, yet further changes were, of course, made. Thus the plan shows the hall as arranged for the banquet described in Book I, Chap. 3. By this time, it will be seen, a smaller table has been put up across the hall, before the high seat, with a loose outer bench for the servants.

Above the "outer room" and the "closet" at the lower end of the hall, there was, at Husaby, a loft-room (Margret's bower) reached by a ladder leading up from the hall.

3. GUNNULF'S SONG

Master Gunnulf must evidently have come upon an early version of the old English ballad, "The Falcon," and have adapted it freely, with an eye to edification.

4. LADY MIDWIVES

The Church laws, as well as the custom, of mediæval Norway (and Denmark) made it the duty of all married women to act as midwives to the women of their neighbourhood. The housewives living in the neighbourhood (*grannekoner*) were bound to come, each accompanied by a serving-woman (*gridkone*). Professional midwives were unknown, but any woman who gained a name for skill in midwifery was bound to go wherever she was sent for within half a day's horseback journey. No fee could be claimed for this assistance, but custom required that the father should send the ladies and women away with gifts when they left his house. The value of the gifts was proportioned to the importance of the event—in the case of a first-born son the father would be expected to show special generosity.

When an heir to an estate was expected, the father should, months before, have prayed every neighbouring housewife of social standing to come to his wife's assistance. This was a matter of practical importance, as the ladies' evidence might be required to settle questions of inheritance. For instance, if the mother and child both died, the

ladies could testify whether the child had been born alive and been christened, and whether it had died before or after its mother. In the former case the wife's family inherited her share of the joint estate; in the latter the husband inherited from the child. A conclave of *sages femmes* of quality would always be a guarantee as to the identity, etc., of an heir, if doubts of any kind arose.

Thus Erlend's failure to invite the ladies of the country-side to his wife's lying-in was a culpably rash, as well as a scandalous, omission.

5. TRONDHJEM CATHEDRAL

In the steep sand-bank by the River Nid, where King Olav's body had lain buried the first winter after his death at the battle of Stiklestad (A. D. 1030), a spring welled up, the waters of which were credited with healing powers. On this site, first marked by a small chapel, a Bishop's Church, completed about the year 1075, was erected, in honour of Christ and St. Olav, the shrine containing the saint's remains being transferred to it from the wooden church in which his successors had lodged it.

In 1152 Norway was organized as an independent ecclesiastical province, and the Archbishopric of Nidaros created, by Cardinal Nicholas Breakspeare, afterwards Pope Hadrian IV. Shortly after, the building of the great Cathedral was begun, on the site of the existing Bishop's Church. "The man who had the most far-reaching influence on the work," says Professor Nordhagen, "was Eystein Erlandson, the imperious and highly gifted third Archbishop (1161–1188)." The work was begun in the Norman style, but, on returning from a three years' exile in England (1180–1183)—a result of his quarrel with the no less imperious and forceful King Sverre—Eystein brought with him the new ideas in architecture which had shortly before reached England and were even then being put into practice in the building of the choir of Canterbury Cathedral. Later, the work continued to be influenced by the contemporary developments of Gothic in England. Completed, in its first form, in the 14th century (about the period of this book), the Cathedral was the wonder of the North, and was sought by thousands of pilgrims, come to visit the shrine of the saint and the wonder-working well. The press was greatest at the time of the great Olav's Festival—the 29th July. *Feginsbrekka*—"The Hill of Joy"—was the hill on the pilgrims' route from the top of which they first caught sight of the city and the Cathedral.

The first of numerous fires from which the Cathedral has suffered

was that of 1328, referred to in this book. It was again swept by fire in 1432 and 1531, yet even as it stood half destroyed in 1567 it is described by a Norwegian writer of the period as "the crown, the flower and ornament of the kingdom." There were further visitations by fire in 1708 and 1719, so that in the 18th and 19th centuries its original glories were much obscured. Very elaborate schemes of restoration were put in hand towards the end of the 19th century, and have in great part been carried out; though the renovation of the west front remains to be completed.

6. COURT OF SIX

Practically all nobles, and a great part of the landed gentry of Norway, were *hirdmænd* (in this book, translated "Guardsmen" or "King's-men"); that is to say, had at one time or another served in the King's household. Suits at law between such *hirdmænd* were referred, not to the ordinary *Things* (see Note 9), but to a special Court of Six (*seksmandsdom*), composed of six of the parties' fellow-*hirdmænd*.

7. NORWAY, 1319–1335

Magnus VII (King of Norway 1319–1343) was the grandson of Haakon V, being the son of Haakon's daughter Ingeborg by Duke Eirik of Sweden. In 1318 Duke Eirik was murdered by his brother, King Birger. The party of the murdered Duke rose and drove away the King, making the baby prince Magnus King of Sweden in his place. The leader of their army was the gallant and handsome Danish knight, Knut Porse, who had been the Duke's loyal vassal.

Since Magnus was heir to the throne of Norway also, King Haakon on his death-bed foresaw a union of the two crowns. He appointed eight Norwegian lords as a Council of State for the minor King, and made them swear solemnly to rule according to the laws of the country, and to keep out foreigners from all posts of influence, especially from the strongholds of the crown. When, on the death of Haakon in 1319, Magnus became King of both countries, an agreement was entered into by the Councils of the two realms, providing for their independent relations and respective duties. The King's mother was given a very influential position in both countries.

She very soon began to abuse her power in favour of Knut Porse, and the attachment of the young widow to her champion became much

talked of. Knut Porse's plan was to bring the then Danish province of Skaane (Scania in southern Sweden) by conquest under the Swedish crown, and win a Dukedom for himself, so as to be in a position to marry the Lady Ingeborg. When, in 1321, King Magnus' little sister Eufemia was betrothed to a son of Duke Henry the Lion of Mecklenburg, in the presence of members of both the Swedish and Norwegian governments, a secret compact was made between the Duke and Sir Knut, by which the Duke pledged himself to furnish soldiers in support of the Skaane enterprise. Some Norwegian noblemen, among them Sir Munan Baardssön, who was an intimate friend of Sir Knut and Lady Ingeborg, attached their seals to this compact. And Lady Ingeborg, who had unlawfully carried the Great Seal out of Norway, tried by all means to raise funds for the war.

But in the summer of 1322 the Swedish lords met in parliament at Skara, and by a *coup d'état* took all power out of the hands of the lady; and in February, 1323, the Norwegian nobles, under the leadership of Archbishop Eiliv, gathered at Oslo and followed the Swedish example. A young lord of the highest descent in the land and of great wealth, Sir Erling Vidkunssön, was made Regent of Norway, with the title of *Drotsete* (here translated High Steward), with the Council of nobles to assist him.

As a result of the union of the two crowns, Norway had been dragged into the wars between Sweden and Russia, and for some years from 1323 onwards the Russians made a series of destructive raids on the coasts of Northern Norway, coming as far south as Haalogaland (the modern Nordland's Amt). Sir Erling took measures to defend the country, and achieved some success, but he wanted money badly, as Lady Ingeborg had left him an empty treasury. He sought assistance from the Bishops, as the Russians were accounted heretics or worse; the Archbishop stood by him, but Bishop Audfinn of Bergen refused help. In the years following, Erling had several quarrels with this Bishop, who was a staunch partisan of Lady Ingeborg. In particular the Bishop defended the lady's rights to some estates in his diocese when, in 1326, she further enraged her native country by marrying Knut Porse, who, by one of the vicissitudes in the struggle between the Danish King, Christopher II, and his nobles, had now become a Danish Duke. Knut Porse, however, died in 1330, leaving his widow with two little sons, Haakon and Knut.

In 1326 peace was made between Norway and Russia, on terms not unfavourable to Norway.

In 1330 King Magnus, now sixteen years old, was declared to be

of age, and Erling Vidkunssön resigned. King Magnus took up his stepfather's plan of winning Skaane, stayed on in Sweden, and made an old antagonist of Sir Erling's, Paal Baardsen, his Chancellor for Norway and bearer of the Great Seal. But when, in 1333, Paal was chosen Archbishop in succession to Archbishop Eiliv, Magnus failed to appoint a new Chancellor; and, as the King still stayed on in Sweden, always in want of money and demanding supplies, and leaving Norway without any lawful government, a party among the Norwegian nobles, headed by Erling Vidkunssön and the King's young cousins, Jon and Sigurd Haftorssön, rose against him. The matter was, however, settled the same year without bloodshed; the leaders of the revolt were forgiven, and kept their position and titles, King Magnus appointed Sir Ivar Ogmundssön *Drotsete* and Chancellor for Norway, the Council's powers were strengthened, and Norway once more had a working government. This seems to have been all that was aimed at by Erling Vidkunssön, whom history represents as an upright, honourable, brave and sensible man, though somewhat lacking in the vigour which achieves great things.

Erlend Nikulaussön's subsequent attempt to separate the crowns of Norway and Sweden by placing Lady Ingeborg's son Haakon on the Norwegian throne has escaped the notice of history, which, however, records the wedding of King Magnus at Tunsberg in 1335 to the Countess Blanche of Namur.

8. WAR LEVIES

The word translated "levy" or "war levy" is in the original *leding*. All landholders were bound to pay to the crown an annual contribution (*leding*) towards the defence of the country. This was due in time of peace as well as in war-time; but they might be called on for additional voluntary assistance in emergencies.

Failure to pay the tax rendered the defaulter liable to fine. Lavrans undertakes to pay any fines that may be imposed on his tenants owing to their refusal to comply with the illegal demands made upon them under colour of the enforcement of the contribution.

9. THINGS

At the period of this book there were three classes of *Things* (popular assemblies):

I. The parish Thing (held ordinarily at regular intervals, but

which could also be specially summoned) for the transaction of all sorts of local business. Appeals from its decisions could be taken to:

II. The county Thing (*Herreds*, or *Fylkesthing*) which was held in each *Fylke* (county) twice a year—in the middle of Lent, and three weeks after the return of the county representatives from the *Lagthing* (see below). These county assemblies were known as *sysselmandsthing*, as they were convened by the *sysselmand* (warden) of the county (see Note 12, *Wardens*). Lawsuits which were to be brought before a *Lagthing* must be announced at these county *Things;* and their sentences and decisions (arrived at by a jury, not by the *sysselmand*, who had no judicial functions) were appealable to the *Lagthing*.

III. The *Lagthing*. Norway was divided into four sections called *lagdömmer*, each of which had its annual *Lagthing*. These were known as *Frostathing, Gulathing, Eidsivathing and Borgarthing*, and, at the time of the story, all met on the same day, St. Botolph's day (17th June). The *Frostathing*, which represented the northern section of the country, met at Nidaros.

Each of the four *lagdömmer* was a complete legislative and judical entity. The *Lagthing* was composed of representatives chosen by the *sysselmænd* from the members of the various county *Things*, and was attended by all the *sysselmænd* of the section, whose duty it was to follow the cases from their several counties, and to report the decisions, and any new legislation, to the county *Things* summoned by them to meet three weeks after their return from the *Lagthing*.

The chairman of the *Lagthing* was known as the *Lagmand*. His functions corresponded roughly with those of the Speaker of the early House of Commons in England.

10. 14TH-CENTURY ROME

Master Gunnulf had, of course, visited Rome during the so-called "Babylonian exile" of the Popes at Avignon, which began in 1305.

11. LAND MEASUREMENTS

See Note 24 to *The Garland*.*

The words here translated "half a hide" are in the original *to maanedsmatsbol*, meaning literally "two months'-meat's-area"—*i. e.*, twice as much land as will feed one man for one month.

* *The Bridal Wreath.*

12. WARDENS

The word translated "Warden" is in the original *sysselmand.* The *sysselmand* was a high official in charge of a district, roughly corresponding to a county in England, his duties being those of a chief administrator, military commander and chief police officer. The appointment was made by the Crown from among gentlemen of distinction—at the period of the story a *sysselmand* would be usually, though not always, a knight. He had to maintain a certain number of armed men and subordinate officials. His remuneration varied in different cases—he might be paid directly by the Crown or remunerated by a share in fines and fiefs.

Among other duties, the *sysselmand* had to hold each year in Lent a "wapinschaw" (*vaabenting*), at which he reviewed the weapons in the possession of the men of his district, to make sure that each man had the weapons he was bound by law to possess, according to his station. He had also to choose the delegates from his district to the annual *Lagthing* of his section of the country (see Note 9, *Things*), and to attend at the *Lagthing* to follow all cases relating to his district. Within three weeks from his return home he had to call a *sysselmandsthing* and there communicate to the people all decisions and sentences of the *Lagthing* affecting his district, all new laws passed, etc. He had to account for the fines and other dues of the Crown to the Treasurer of his section of the country (see Note 15, *Treasurers*).

13. VEÖY

A little island near Molde, where in the Middle Ages there was a small market town, with a couple of churches and a royal mansion.

14. GRACE TO CRIMINALS

When a man had committed any offence punishable with outlawry (such as manslaughter or the abduction of a woman), he might, on making a payment to the Crown, be given leave to remain at his home under the protection of the law till his case was judged.

15. TREASURERS

For purposes of financial administration, Norway was divided into four Treasury Districts (*fehirdsle*), each under a Treasurer

(*fehirde*). The Treasurer of the district which had its head-quarters at Tunsberg was a sort of Minister of Finance, supervising the whole.

16. SAFE-CONDUCT

As a *Hirdmand* (Guardsman—see Note 6), Erlend has the right to be tried by a court of his peers within the boundaries of the *lagdömme* (section—see note 9) where he is domiciled. Having appealed against the finding and sentence of the court on the ground of the illegality of its composition, and claimed a fresh trial, he is granted a safe-conduct in order that he may be taken outside the bounds of the *lagdömme* to be brought before the King. The effect of this is that, if he fails to make his peace with the King, he is entitled to be sent back in safety to his own *lagdömme*, there to be given a fresh trial or to suffer the execution of the sentence of the original court, according as his appeal is or is not admitted.

17. BAAGAHUS

Now Baahus in Sweden, near Gothenburg. The boundary between Norway and Sweden at this time was the Göta River, and Baagahus was the Norwegian frontier town.

18. IMMUNITIES OF FREEMEN

This passage, translated as literally as possible, would run: "why Erlend must not enjoy such personal immunities [*mandhelg*] as are the right of all men save thieves and nithings."

By the ancient laws every free man of Norway was guaranteed *mandhelg—i. e.*, immunity from dishonouring bodily punishments and outrages against his person and honour. This involved, in Saga-times, his right to avenge himself and his kin.